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THE

CATACOMBS

OF

ROME.

Rev. William Ingraham, fb.

Philadelphia:
AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
No. 1122 CHESTNUT STREET.
NEW YORK: 599 BROADWAY.

1854

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☞ NOTE.—The initial letter on page 11 is connected with an ancient vase, on the body of which is inscribed a sentence only part of which appears in the engraving. The whole sentence translated is, "Vincent, drink and live!"

THE CATACOMBS OF ROME.

CHAPTER I.

THE VATICAN AND THE LAPIDARIES' GALLERY.

THE Vatican is the name of an irregular mass of buildings at Rome, connected, at one extremity, with the magnificent cathedral of St. Peter's. The name is derived from that of the hill on which it stands; a name given to it by the old Romans on account of the "vaticinations" or divinations of the Etruscan and Roman "vates" or soothsayers, who made it the place of their fraudulent juggleries, and hence it is called the Vatican Hill.

*See p. 10.

The buildings have been erected at different times, and in various styles of architecture. They enclose more than twenty large courts, and contain, probably, about five thousand apartments. Some of the most ancient constitute the Papal Palace, which was for several centuries the constant residence of the Pope, and is still his occasional residence and his official seat. In the chapels of the Papal Palace are some of the best productions of Michael Angelo and Raphael, the greatest names in modern art. The library, occupying another part of the Vatican, is one of the largest in the world, and is especially rich in the number of manuscripts written long before the art of printing was in use. The Museum, which is connected with the palace and the library by a corridor about a thousand feet long, is filled with sculptures gathered from the ruins of a hundred ancient cities, or wrought by modern skill, and with paintings where the canvass seems to glow with life. To these treasures of art, acquired by the expenditure of the vast wealth of the Roman hierarchy during several centuries, there is constantly directed from other countries a tide of pil-

grims as zealous in their admiration of these wonders of the chisel and the pencil as were those of old in their adoration of "dead men's bones," or in their desire for absolution and indulgences.

In some of the buildings there are vast collections of what may be called the "curiosities" of the ancient and modern world; some of them procured by excavations among buildings covered by the wreck of the earthquake or volcano, or thrown down by barbarian violence; others gathered by diligent search over all parts of the earth. During long periods of its history the Roman Church was destructive of all beauty, both in nature and in art; but for some centuries it has endeavoured to make its central seat attractive to all classes of visiters. The scholar and the artist, the stupid clown and the filthy barefooted pilgrim, can each find his favourite shrines, saints, and priesthood. There is the shrine of St. Luke, whom they have presumed to enthrone as the patron saint of painters, as well as one of St. Anthony, to whom they have assigned the special care of asses and horses. No degree of refinement, no depth of brutal ignorance,

is disregarded in the wiles of papal sorcery.

But the attention of our readers is to be particularly directed to the remains of Christian antiquity deposited in one portion of the Vatican. It is only as introductory to this that we have led them through its other spacious apartments. But a doubt may arise whether any confidence can be placed in the genuineness or true antiquity of these relics, or of any of them. We have heard so much of this department of papal imposture, that much skepticism on this subject may be forgiven. We have, within the last year, seen the citizens of Amiens, with the pomp of military array, and of richly robed ecclesiastical dignitaries, go forth to meet the bones of a woman of whom nothing, absolutely nothing, is known, excepting that she, or her husband, was probably born at Amiens. She, perhaps a Christian, perhaps a pagan, has been dragged from a Roman cemetery, with the sanction of the Pope labelled a martyr and saint, and borne in triumph to a gorgeous shrine in a populous city, there to be adored as its protecting goddess. Within this same year, also, we

have seen in the official "Gazette of Vienna" the announcement to its inhabitants that the *tooth* of St. Peter, given by Pius IX., the now reigning Pope, to the Emperor of Austria, and deposited in the imperial chapel, would be, for four days, exposed to the sight and reverence of the faithful! We know, also, how many heads, and arms, and teeth, and sometimes bodies, of the same saint, may be found in different churches, all bearing the attestation of the same hierarchy. At the time of the great Reformation, the fragments of the cross, enshrined and adored in different parts of Christendom, would have fully freighted a large merchant-ship. Even now, when Protestantism and increasing knowledge have thrown the greater part of that lumber into the fire, so much remains on holy altars and in costly reliquaries, the object of an absolute idolatry, that if only a tenth of it came from Calvary, the crosses of the thieves must have furnished all their wood for modern Catholic devotion.

Such things, indeed, justify a scrupulous examination before we receive any relic as genuine upon papal testimony. But there

are genuine remains of early Christianity, and these are rendered only more valuable by the existence of so many worthless forgeries. In that magnificent library of the Vatican is a manuscript of the Bible, containing the Old Testament of the Septuagint translators, and the New Testament in its original. Its date is assigned, by the best scholars, to the fourth century. In near compartments of the same library are richly illuminated manuscripts, once the property of kings and nobles, containing legends of apocryphal saints, tales of ridiculous miracles and homilies of monkish doctrine, at the recital of which all the world would now laugh, and which no Roman priest would now repeat, even to the stupid Apennine mountaineer whose mule he is sprinkling with holy water. Precious is the Bible, always—everywhere. But what "glory gilds that sacred page" when seen in such a place, with such associations! How does its voice, resounding from the depths of fifteen centuries, testify to the old truth which the apostles preached, and for which the martyrs died—the gospel of our salvation through the grace of God by faith in Christ Jesus!

And how decisive is its testimony against the whole system of self-righteousness, man-worship, priestly mediation, and rites of baptized paganism, now usurping the titles and honours of the primitive Christianity! It is not strange that this celebrated manuscript of the Scriptures is the least accessible of all the manuscripts of the Vatican, shut up from the free inspection of the inquiring scholar, as its translation is from a free circulation among the people.

And thus, in the gallery of Christian antiquities in the Vatican, while there are many spurious articles, the fraud of which an observer can easily detect, and many thousand articles truly ancient, but the relics of centuries when the purity and simplicity of the first faith and worship had become more or less corrupted,—there are many others, true memorials of the early disciples and martyrs, bearing witness how they preached and how they believed.

The most important of these relics were collected by industrious antiquarians, zealous for knowledge or curious in matters of art, and probably little aware of the historical use of their discoveries; and they were arranged

for inspection, and volumes of descriptions published, before attention had been drawn to their bearings upon the great controversy between Rome and the gospel. Their genuineness is therefore unquestionable, and we have the right and the privilege of listening to their testimony for Christ and his truth. Perhaps our hearts may be the better for this communion with those who so long ago confessed his name and died in faith.

Let us return, then, to the long corridor, or gallery, to which we have already incidentally referred. It is called the *Lapidarian Gallery*, from a Latin word which means a stone-cutter, and is applied also to his work. It will be seen that this department of the Vatican is very properly so named.

This gallery is, as we have said, one thousand feet, (or nearly one-fifth of a mile,) in length. It is almost filled with the records of the dead, the Christian and pagan dead of centuries long past. To the walls of this avenue, upon both sides, are attached flat *stones*, generally from one to three feet in length, but less in width, and often of irregular form, having upon the surfaces inscriptions, sculptures, and occasionally a little

painting. There are more than three thousand of these tablets in this gallery. Some of them are votive tablets, (that is, erected in fulfilment of a vow,) others dedications of pagan altars, others fragments of some public record. But these are comparatively few in number. Almost all *these tablets are the tomb-stones of ancient Romans;* and the inscriptions upon their fronts are their epitaphs, such as are engraved upon the tomb-stones of the present day. And as we walk along this gallery, we may read upon the right hand and on the left, the names and something of the character of persons who lived in Rome fifteen or sixteen hundred years ago, and some probably at the beginning of the Christian era.

They are the tomb-stones of Romans; but at that time there were many *Christians* in that great city, although the majority of its people were still pagans,—such pagans as Paul describes in the first chapter of his epistle to his Christian friends in Rome. We might expect then, that some of these tablets would refer to Christians, and others to pagans. Such is the fact; and it is generally as easy

to distinguish the one from the other as it would be to distinguish a portion of our Scriptures from a chapter of the Koran; or as easy as it would be to distinguish our missionaries and their children from the heathen to whom they were telling the story of Christ crucified. Skilful antiquaries have carefully attempted to separate and classify those tablets; and have arranged the pagan memorials on the right side and the Christian upon the left, as we pass on from the common door of entrance. Thus, as we walk along between these two files of old Romans, and hear them speak, as from "marble lips," we can judge for ourselves whether there was in ancient times any difference "between those who served God and those who served him not;" and it may be well for us also to consider on which side of the dividing line we should wish to have *our* names stand, should future generations perchance read a similar record of us and our contemporaries. Almost all the monumental tablets designated as Christian were taken from the CATACOMBS OF ROME, which we shall make the chief subject of this volume. The greater

portion were brought up into the light of day about three hundred years ago; but there have been added, from time to time, many relics which the numerous explorers of the Catacombs have since discovered. To this gallery of Christian memorials we shall again and again return.

Nero, Sixth Emperor of Rome.

CHAPTER II.

THE CATACOMBS OF EGYPT AND OF PARIS.

Before visiting the Catacombs of Rome, it may be well to glance at some of the similar excavations found in other countries. The oldest of which we have any knowledge are those of Egypt, which are very numerous and often of vast extent. Many of them were made in the time of the Pharaohs, more than three thousand years ago.

Probably the first excavations, afterwards used as tombs, were originally made in order to obtain durable material for buildings. The river Nile, through the greater part of its course in Egypt, is attended by two ranges of mountains or hills, one on either side, and for the most part parallel with the stream, and at a short distance from it. Sometimes they approach each other, leaving to the river only a narrow passage between high and steep battle-

ments of rocks; but generally there is, between their base and the bank of the river, a belt of land varying in width from a few rods to as many miles. This interval, which is usually much broader on the western than on the eastern side, is made rich and productive by the overflowing of the Nile; and the granaries of Egypt are for the most part supplied from this fertile valley.

Along this interval, and upon elevated places, the ancient cities stood. The more durable materials for building these cities, as well as for rearing those vast and wonderful monuments with which this country abounds,—the temples of their gods and the pyramids of their kings,—were taken from the sides of these mountain ranges. Very numerous and very extensive quarries must therefore have been wrought in order to furnish the requisite materials both for the masses and the ornaments of their gigantic structures.

From earliest times the Egyptians were accustomed to embalm their dead. In this condition bodies could be preserved for an indefinite period. Some of these mummies are, apparently, as perfect to-day as when

first embalmed, two or three thousand years ago. This desire to preserve the remains of the dead uncorrupted, rendered it necessary that in the vicinity of every large city and in every populous district, a space should be appropriated for the residence of the dead, perhaps equal in extent to that occupied by the living. The security of their embalmed dead required also stronger walls for their "long home" than the soft mud of the river bank, or the loose sand of the desert. Under these circumstances they would naturally think of these spacious excavations as suitable resting-places and store-houses of their dead; and in the silent chambers of the dry sandstone rock they would deposit their mummied bodies. Thus, probably, these quarries in the mountain-sides became the final homes of the very persons who had helped to form them.

Soon, however, the more wealthy and noble caused other excavations to be made, solely for the purposes of burial for themselves and their families. These were, of course, smaller, but more convenient for the purpose, and many of them richly ornamented. They covered the walls with paintings and

hieroglyphics, and even furnished the apartments as if for the living.

If, as some suppose, the Egyptians thought the souls of the dead tarried with the body as long as the body remained entire, then these pictures and writings upon the walls of their resting-places and other articles thus deposited, were probably designed to entertain the souls of the departed while they were awaiting there in solitude. They could read, in those inscriptions, the prominent events of their own lives, or their family history, or some of the most memorable things of the times in which they had lived!

These quarries for buildings and excavations for burial were in some localities so numerous that the mountain-sides were riddled almost to the resemblance of a honeycomb.

Such underground burial-places received from the Greeks a name which, with hardly the change of a letter, forms our word "catacombs," and which, in their language, means a "hollow," or recess abounding in caves.

From these ancient tombs in the rocks of Egypt have been taken all the mummies

(or at least the best specimens of mummies) which have been exhibited in such numbers in Europe and America. There is no probability that the supply will fail, as these catacombs, with their embalmed inhabitants, are found at short intervals all along the mountain-sides, on both banks of the Nile, for scores of miles. They are most numerous, however, and most extensive in the neighbourhood of the ancient cities, as Memphis and Thebes.

An English traveller in Egypt thus describes the "Tombs of the Kings," which are on the western side of the Nile, near Thebes. Although these are much more magnificent than those of the common people, they will help us to form a more distinct and correct idea of them. The traveller left the Nile, crossed the plain, and entered a valley between the mountains, and followed this gradually narrowing defile for half an hour, until a range of gloomy, perpendicular precipices in the sandstone mountain forbade all further progress.

"At the foot of this melancholy barrier we descried a few dark apertures, like entrances to subterranean caverns, singularly

gloomy and mysterious in effect: in the rocky walls of the lateral fissures we gradually made out others, and these were entrances of those wonderful tombs which the kings of mighty Thebes made for themselves 'in desolate places;' many of which still remain hidden from research among the deep chasms of this funereal region.

"The sandy valley, with the reflection from the arid cliffs, began to grow glaring and oppressive as we stood at the head of the flight of steps which descends steeply into the principal tomb. It is not without awe that we penetrate by this ruined stair-case into the abode of death. The shadows fall deeper as we descend, and the faint blue light from above just enables us to see the sculptures on the dusky walls which line the passages, hieroglyphics relating to the owner of the tomb, and figures emblematical of the passage into the realms of futurity."

After having described the ruins of temples, statues and the various monuments of antiquity with which that region abounds, the same writer adds—

"These isolated monuments are far from giving an adequate impression of Thebes.

They stand on the edge of a vast funereal field, extending from the cultivated alluvium to the sandstone mountain which bounds the plain, intersected by obscure and dangerous paths among yawning mummy-pits and graves. Ranges of tombs hewn in the mountain above, some greater in extent even than those of the kings, penetrate far into the bowels of the mountain; chamber after chamber, and passage after passage, whose walls, as the light is applied to them, kindle into a vivid epitome of the life of the old Egyptian world—its religious solemnities, its familiar usages, its progress from the cradle to the grave, its scenes of daily domestic life, of high festivity and solemn funeral, with the passage of the dead into the realms of futurity, the judgment and the mysterious transmigration of the soul.

"Who could suspect that all this is revealed to us in these wonderful sepulchres, which externally appear but holes in the sandy rock? And how strange and sad is it to come forth to the light of day, after this long and absorbing converse in these dusky recesses with the past life of this great people, and behold the wrecks of their

proud city wide-spread over the empty, desolate plain! The pits also in which are deposited the mummied remains of the ancient inhabitants are among the most singular spectacles. Some of the bodies are merely dried, but those of the more wealthy classes, enveloped in a shroud of fine linen, with aromatic gums, are heaped together in horrid grotesque confusion, like the skeletons and heaps of bones in a neglected charnel-house.

"Few things are more impressive than to wander through this Necropolis of Thebes, where the mighty and the rich lie blended with inferior dust; bewildered among this chaos of tombs, and mummy-pits, and yawning chasms, among which you must cautiously pick your way, and where the sole sound heard is the yelling of dogs echoing wildly among the cliffs."

Leaving for a while these ancient sleepers in their rocky chambers, let us look at a specimen of *modern* catacombs; which may be useful as a further introduction to our survey of those of ancient Rome.

The Catacombs of Paris furnish many interesting points of resemblance to those of

Rome, especially in regard to their origin and their subsequent use.

The oldest part of the city of Paris is that which lies on the south side of the river Seine. The materials for building that splendid city have been derived chiefly from quarries underlying this part of it. The material is a kind of limestone, which is easily wrought at first, but which becomes very hard on exposure to the air.

These quarries now extend under one sixth part of the whole city; that is, they extend over an area of two hundred acres or more. In order to make the roof over them more firm and safe, columns of solid rock are left here and there, like the pillars of a great cathedral, and sometimes new supports of masonry have been added. But notwithstanding all this precaution, the roof has in some instances given way, precipitating into the depths the houses which were standing above them.

In one of the passage-ways which run through those quarries is a deep well of pure water, which was sunk in order to supply the workmen while making the excavations; and in another quarter there is a living

spring with a clear, pebbly bottom, and gold-fish sporting in its waters, which was unexpectedly struck upon, after great expense and labour had been incurred upon the well.

As the population of any city increases, so increases the number of its dead; and all must be buried "out of the sight" of the living. Soon or late, in every large city, there is a difficulty in finding room for its extensive cemeteries. Fearful dangers to the living also follow upon the neglect to provide suitable mansions for the dead. Such was the condition of Paris as to its burial-places, when, about the year 1785, some persons (borrowing the idea from ancient Egypt or Rome) proposed that these extensive quarries underneath the living Paris, should become the resting-place of the far more numerous Paris dead.

The suggestion was adopted, and soon carried out. As a part of the plan, many of the ancient cemeteries in and around the city were to be emptied of their sleeping tenants, and thus converted into building-lots or gardens.

Accordingly the strange work began, and

the bones of the dead of former generations were dug up and placed in funeral cars, and then borne along in the silence of night, attended by priests chanting the burial-service, and cast down, through a perpendicular shaft or pit, into the dark apartments below. There they were separated and assorted—all bones of the same kind being thrown together, although they may have belonged originally to ten thousand different persons; and finally they were arranged in courses, or tiers, along the walls and in the spaces of these subterranean apartments and passage-ways. It is estimated that these catacombs now contain the bones of more than three millions of persons!

Through this strange and impressive scenery,—this Golgotha of the skeletons of many generations,—an American traveller passed in the year 1842, and thus describes its appearance and the impressions which it made upon his own mind:—

"We descended by ninety steps, and found ourselves alone in the caverns. Following our guide about twenty minutes, we came to a strong door, each side of which was ornamented with pillars of Tuscan

Interior of Catacombs. p. 92.

architecture. Over the door is this inscription in Latin:—'Beyond these limits they rest, awaiting a blessed hope.'

"Our guide opened the heavy door, and, as it grated on its hinges, I felt an involuntary shudder, which was not quieted when we passed the threshold and found ourselves surrounded by walls of human bones, which the glare of our tapers showed to be regularly piled up from the floors to the roof of the quarries. The bones of the legs and the arms are laid closely in order, with their ends outward; and at regular intervals skulls are interspersed in three horizontal ranges, disposed so as to present alternate rows of the back and the front part of the head; and sometimes a single perpendicular range is seen, still further varying the general outline.

"Passing along what seemed to be interminable ranges of these piles of human remains, we came to several apartments arranged like chapels, with varied dispositions of the piles of legs, arms and grinning skulls. Here, too, were vases and altars; some formed of bones entirely, and others surrounded with them. On many of these

were inscriptions, generally of a religious bearing.

"How new, how strange were the associations of the place! Over our heads was rolling the vast tide of life, in the gay and wicked city. Its million of inhabitants were jostling each other on the high roads of business and pleasure, while here were the remains of four times their number lying, in silent, motionless piles, in the depths below! And we, the living of to-day, were standing among the dead of a thousand years, in the quiet bosom of our mother Earth.

"Religion, too, had thrown her rays of light into this empire of death; and we read, in an inscription before us, the sure word, declaring that even this universal empire shall be broken: '*They that dwell in the dust of the earth shall arise, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*'

"On a stone pillar near by is the admonition, so generally unheeded, but here irresistible, enforced as it is by the mute but eloquent evidences around: '*Remember that thou art dust.*'

"The inscriptions, '*Tomb of the Revolu-*

tion,' '*Tomb of the Victims*,' over two chapels built up with bones, tell of the days of strife and blood between 1789 and 1793; and here are the remains of those who perished in their frightful massacres. Altogether the effect of the place and its associations was oppressive in the extreme."*

The traveller has referred to the religious faith expressed in some of the inscriptions. The almost universal absence of the language of Christian hope from the monuments of Pere La Chaise and other Paris cemeteries has been often remarked by English and American visiters. During the reign of atheism and of terror in the French Revolution, many inscriptions were placed in the catacombs, conveying, in most revolting plainness, the gloomy doctrines of fatalism and annihilation. Some of them yet remain; others have been made to give place to the utterances of that blessed hope of a resurrection to immortal life, brought to light by the gospel of Christ.

As an illustration of this, we will refer again to that living spring uncovered during

* Dr. Durbin, vol. i. 36, &c.

the labours of the workmen. Their employers could then find for it only the wretched name of the "Fountain of Lethe," or oblivion, and inscribed near it the gloomy verses of Virgil, representing the naked and miserable ghosts driven to that fabled river, there to drink eternal forgetfulness. It has now the name of the "Fountain of the Samaritan Woman," and the inscription is a transcript of the sublime words addressed to her by our Saviour, John iv. 13, 14: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

We add a few words concerning the catacombs of another city in France, on account of some facts concerning their use as places of refuge, and of voluntary resort—in these points of their history resembling the catacombs of ancient Rome.

In the time of the Norman invasion of France, in the ninth century, the inhabitants of Quesnel took refuge in the quarries from which the material of their houses had been

taken. Finding these quarries too narrow and close for convenience, they enlarged them in width and height. Here they concealed themselves, their furniture, and even their cattle; and to this day it is said that the young people of the district are wont to assemble there and spend long winter evenings in work or social festivities.

The descriptions and histories given in this chapter will furnish valuable suggestions and illustrations as we return to quarries and cemeteries consecrated by the visits of the early Christians, and by the ashes of their dead,—the catacombs of the Imperial City.

Tiberius, third Emperor of Rome.

CHAPTER III.

THE CATACOMBS OF ROME—THEIR ORIGIN.

The catacombs of Rome, like those we have already described, were excavations made at first for the purpose of obtaining building material for the city. As Rome stood on seven hills, it was an easy matter to open quarries in the hill-sides, and here, undoubtedly, the work began. The earth in that neighbourhood abounds in a loose, porous stone, called *tufa*, composed of volcanic cinders, or ashes, which, by the agency of water containing lime in solution, have formed a rock that is quite soft in its original bed, but hardens on being exposed to the air. It is consequently very easily cut in the quarry, and then becomes a very durable material in the construction of buildings; and this is the character of the principal part of the building material for both ancient and modern Rome. Several other cities in Italy and in

Sicily, (as, for example, Naples and Syracuse,) are built of the same kind of stone, obtained in the same manner; and the excavations in the vicinity of these cities, made in obtaining it, have been used for the same purposes as we shall hereafter find those of Rome were.

In some places in the vicinity of the city the same volcanic materials, in their original bed, have not hardened into stone, but are more like a compact sand, being sufficiently hard and tenacious to form a roof for the chambers excavated by the workmen. This sandy material, now called "pozzolana," or "puzzolana," was almost as valuable to the Romans as the more solid rock, for they could make of it a very strong cement, the very thing needed to bind together the blocks of stone. A variety of this "pozzolana," found in certain localities, forms that very peculiar and valuable cement which hardens under water, and which is known in commerce as "Roman cement."

These sand-pits and stone-quarries were, of course, extended and multiplied in proportion to the increasing wants of a growing city.

It was not long before all the seven hills upon which the city stood were perforated beneath with cells, passages, quarries and galleries. The Esquiline Hill, which was the largest of the seven and stood upon the coast, was so thoroughly undermined in this way as to render it dangerous to pass there, except with great care. We have one remarkable narrative of a fearful crime committed in these Esquiline sand-quarries, in an oration of Cicero's before a Roman judicial tribunal, sixty-six years before the birth of our Saviour.

It is a story like those so often reported in the criminal records of modern cities, of a rich young man committing himself to the society of the profligate, encouraged by them in every licentious excess, and cheered by their professions of disinterested friendship, till they have completed their arrangements for the plunder of their dupe and the division among themselves of the spoil. Then they rid themselves in the most summary way of the miserable victim of his own folly and of their seductions. The young profligate of Rome was led, upon the pretence of a visit to the pleasure gardens,

to this retired and dangerous ground, and there murdered in one of these subterranean pits. Another circumstance caused the whole vicinity of these excavations under and around the Esquiline Hill to be deserted by all the reputable citizens, rendering it more infamous and dangerous.

It was the general custom among the Romans of that day to burn their dead. There were some exceptions, even of the most noble families; but among those able to incur the expense of the funeral pyre, the exceptions were, comparatively, very few. But a vast multitude of the population were too poor to furnish the needed materials for a funeral pile; and the slaves, whose numbers were immense, were generally "buried with the burial of a dog." Those, also, who had been put to death for crimes, and suicides, were prohibited by law from what was considered the most honourable rite. From the necessity thus existing, the senate gave up this hill as a common burial-ground, where a burial might be had without cost, and without regard to the character of the deceased. The result was that the dead criminals and the dead poor and dead strangers,

were brought hither, and thrown promiscuously into these sand-pits, or quarries.

Even now, in Naples, a city called Christian, the royal seat of the king most catholic, almost all of the vast numbers of its dead are thrown into common pits, with a horrid recklessness, of which we might search in vain even the brute creation to find a parallel. And yet for some, even of the slaves, deposited here, there was a kinder provision than is now made for the poor Neapolitan. "Hither," (says the Roman poet Horace, of this region,) "the cast-out bodies of slaves were brought by their fellow-servants to be deposited in ill-made coffins in narrow cells. This mass of corruption made the whole atmosphere of that quarter unpleasant and unwholesome. All therefore who could, removed to other parts of the city, or to the plains around the city. And thus this neighbourhood was deserted of all except the more miserable of the living, and the robber and outlaw, who burrowed there, close by the decaying dead—knowing that the officers of justice would be reluctant to go there to ferret them out and bring them to punishment. While it was in this condition the

attention of the senate was called to it as to a "public nuisance."

Subsequently, and about the time of the birth of our Saviour, the Emperor Augustus gave that whole district to his wealthy friend Mæcenas, with the understanding that he should redeem it from its wretched condition. In the course of a few years Mæcenas had expelled all the criminals from their hiding-places, had filled up the open pits, which act also covered up the putrefying dead, smoothed down the surface, planted there beautiful and extensive gardens, and built for himself a magnificent palace. Here he lived in splendour and luxury; and as he was the special friend and patron of learning, here were frequently gathered around him the most illustrious authors and scholars of his day. We may correctly imagine him, with Virgil and Horace at his side, walking among the fountains, or seated under the cool shades of his garden, or reclining at a luxurious banquet, while the bones of the dead filled the old quarries beneath them.

But we have wandered a little from our subject, and so hasten back to say that al-

though this section of the city was no longer used for the purposes of burial, still the habit of burying the dead in these quarries and sand-pits was continued in every direction in other quarters and on all sides. The growth of the city required a constant increase of the subterranean excavations, in order to get materials for their dwellings; and the proportionate increase of the dead each year kept pace with this increase of space beneath the ground for their reception.

It may help the reader to estimate the probable extent of these subterranean excavations, if he will consider the size of the city and of some of the many public buildings which added much to its glory. The old Romans were gross idolaters, and worshipped a multitude of gods. History tells us that at one time they had one hundred and twenty temples dedicated to as many deities. There were also very extensive and magnificent baths, numbering in all, public and private, seventeen hundred at least; many of them, though called "baths," containing large libraries, galleries of art, covered walks, and halls for gymnastic ex-

Colosseum.

p. 45.

ercises. The water for the city was introduced and distributed by twenty aqueducts of stone, resting on arches of two or three stories, and one of them sixty miles long! The Cochituate water-works of Boston, the Croton works of New York, and the Fairmount works of Philadelphia, if all united, would not compare with the aqueducts of this single city, in point of extent or magnificence.

There was one theatre that could accommodate twenty-two thousand spectators; another, forty thousand; and one amphitheatre, the Coliseum, within whose vast capacity one hundred thousand could sit and witness the bloody sports of the arena.

As we shall refer to this again in a future chapter, we here introduce an engraved view of the ruins of this magnificent structure.

Add to these a great number of other public buildings, whose remains even now testify as to their greatness, the lofty walls of the city, and the almost innumerable dwellings of the common people, a multitude that at some periods of the history of Rome were numbered by millions; and consider, too, that the city had been in existence some

seven hundred years, during which time many of these public works were destroyed and replaced by others; and we may then understand that as all, or almost all, the materials had been taken from beneath the soil, there would hardly be any limit to the excavations. We must not wonder, then, when we are told that, in some directions from the city, the land was perforated with one continued net-work of excavations for the distance of fifteen miles.

Here, then, beneath the soil, are the apartments opened and space prepared for many interesting incidents relating both to the living and the dead. And besides all the knowledge we now have of what happened and was recorded there, who can say how many events and records, equally interesting, lie there unknown and unread amid those intricate ramifications, and will lie thus concealed until the great day when the books are opened and all secret things are made manifest?

General Plan of Catacombs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN ROME.

The Epistle of Paul to the Romans is a religious letter from that apostle to his fellow Christians, or to the Christian church in that city. He often wrote to his brethren in Christ similar letters of instruction and of love, when circumstances prevented his visiting them in person. It is generally supposed that this epistle was written about A. D. 57. In the eighth verse of the first chapter, Paul thanks God through Jesus Christ that their faith is spoken of "throughout the whole world,"—meaning, of course, the then known world, almost all of which was at that time comprehended within the Roman Empire.

A beacon kindled upon a hill-top in a dark night can be seen throughout a very large extent of the surrounding country: and thus this band of faithful Christians

such as the Saviour called "the light of the world," placed in the capital of the world, were known and made their faith known, not at Rome only, but in her subject nations. Obeying their Master's command, these disciples caused their light to shine before men, and they saw their good works and glorified their God and Saviour. Strangers coming into Rome from the distant provinces heard of this new sect of "Christians," and, with the curiosity of travellers, sought their acquaintance, and carried back a report of them and of their doctrines to their own homes. They were represented as abstaining from fleshly lusts, faithful in duty and abounding in charity. Even the heathen who knew them with any degree of intimacy, could not but testify to their integrity. It is not strange that Paul, whose whole body and soul and spirit were devoted to the service and glory of Christ, rejoiced and thanked God when he heard among all nations such testimonies concerning the Christians of Rome, so honourable to their faith and to its Author.

We may infer generally from this epistle that the church at Rome was already nume-

rous; a fact confirmed by the statement of pagan writers.

About seven years after this, Paul was himself in Rome. Writing thence to the Christian church at Philippi, he says to them, (chap. iv. 22,) "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household." There were, therefore, at that time, not only many believers in Rome, but Christianity had made so much progress among this idolatrous people, that it had entered into the imperial presence, and had filled some hearts there with joy and peace in believing. This may seem very strange when we remember that the Cæsar at this time was no other than the infamous Nero; but there is no evidence that he had, at this period of his reign, any special enmity to the Christians. Probably, like his tutor Seneca, the philosopher, he regarded all religious faith and forms of worship with utter indifference, if they came not in direct collision with his personal dignity or sensual indulgences. He wore, also, for some years, the mask of a character specially gentle and merciful—a tiger covered with the fleece of the lamb. There may, then, have been,

even in his household, no special obstacles to the triumph of the gospel, except those existing everywhere at Rome. But if Nero had been then the visible tyrant which he became seven years afterward, when he cruelly persecuted the Christians, and if all in his household had been naturally as hard-hearted as himself, the Spirit of God was powerful enough to enter even there, and convert the most bitter enemies into the friends of Christ, by the same omnipotent grace which had already converted Saul of Tarsus.

Here, then, was a large church in the midst of an idolatrous and most profligate community. In the very last place where we should have looked for a church of Christ, and among a people whom it would seem almost impossible to interest in such a character as that of our Redeemer, or in such spiritual and peaceable doctrines as He taught—even here, and thus early, we find a church from which "sounded out the word of the Lord" into all the Roman world! Surely, then, the Divine Spirit who was able to accomplish this is also able to establish and to continue the church of Christ in all the cities of the present heathen world;

for in none of them are there such opposing powers of wickedness in every form as in that mighty and corrupt city.

It is a question of much interest how the gospel was first introduced into Rome, and by what agencies its earliest triumphs had been won. The Papists would answer us at once, "By the apostle Peter, certainly, who founded the church, established there his apostolic seat, and made the Church of Rome the mother and head of all the churches."

The first inquiry suggested by such a claim, and an inquiry to which they have never given a satisfactory answer, is, Why then does not Paul mention Peter in this long epistle, which he sent to the church at Rome? It contains, in almost every page, matters on which a reference to that apostle's life or doctrines would seem inevitable, if he had been the founder of that church, or had, in fact, even been with them as a teacher. The last chapter of this epistle is almost filled with the names of persons there, or of those who had been in some way connected with them. But in all the epistle there is no allusion to the person or name of Peter. Moreover, Paul was, afterward, at least two

years a resident at Rome, and from that place wrote his epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, to Philemon, and the second epistle to Timothy; but in none of these is there any hint that Peter was then in Rome, or ever had been there.

Now it is hardly possible to believe that there could have been this total silence on the subject if Peter had ever been in Rome at all, and the silence would be yet more inexplicable if Peter had *founded* that church. It was not at all like the noble-minded Paul either to claim as his own other men's foundations, or to forget or obscure the faithful labours of a fellow-apostle in this manner.

In fact, the history of the apostolic labours contained in the New Testament proves conclusively that during all that part of the first century, the efforts of Peter were directed to the Jews in their own land and in their dispersions—the gospel of the circumcision being committed to him. During those years he could not have visited the distant metropolis of the Gentiles. He may afterward have gone to Rome—he may have suffered martyrdom there—but the very slight testimony to the truth of

either statement is greatly weakened by the mass of improbabilities and impossibilities with which that testimony is encumbered. If, however, he was ever there, it was not till long after the church was founded; not till after Paul's epistles were all written; and, probably, not till after Paul's martyrdom. The only ground for the assumption that Peter founded the church at Rome is a tradition of doubtful character. We shall find information as to the probable origin of the church at Rome in Acts ii. 10.

Among the mixed multitude in Jerusalem at the Pentecost, Luke mentions "*strangers of Rome.*" These were devout Jews, or proselytes to the Jewish religion, who had come up from Rome to celebrate the great religious festivals. They, with others gathered from many nations, heard the sermon of Peter, felt the power of the Holy Ghost upon their hearts, were convicted and converted. In other words, they became Christians.

In due time they returned to their homes in Rome, but it was with a new song in their mouths. The great aim of their labours and lives was thenceforward, whether at home or abroad, whether among Romans or Greeks

or barbarians, not to increase their worldly riches, for they had "found the pearl of great price," but to show forth the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into this marvellous light. Probably they devoted most of their time to spreading abroad the knowledge of His salvation. Being all brethren in Christ, they would visit each other often, to talk over the wonderful scenes they had witnessed at Jerusalem, to express the love which the Saviour had shed abroad in their hearts, and to unite in the sweet exercises of praise and prayer. As soon as even a small number had become familiarly known to each other, their "gathering together" would be at the stated times designated in the Scriptures, and at some appointed place convenient for their meetings. Having received from apostolical authority injunctions to keep not only the faith but also the order of the gospel, there would very soon be officers of the church, duly set over them in the Lord, whom they esteemed highly in love for their work's sake; and all the special ordinances of the church would be observed, as instituted by its divine Founder.

Such is, probably, the history of the origin of the church at Rome. But, whatever was its origin, and whoever may have been its founder, it was a true church of Christ, and soon became large in numbers, containing, as we have seen, some members from the household of the emperor, and it sent out an influence favourable for the success of the gospel into other parts of the empire.

While thus sending its name and its influence abroad, this church was doing a no less important work at home. Like good leaven it was gradually leavening more and more of the mass with which it was mingled. When a Philip, for instance, had found his Saviour, he immediately went in search of some brother Nathanael, that he also might become acquainted with Christ; or, when an Andrew was called, "he first findeth his own brother Simon," and bringeth him also to Jesus. Thus there were added continually unto the church such as should be saved.

Almost all the apostles, and the first disciples of Christ named in the New Testament, were from the humbler classes. The learned doctors, the Pharisees and rulers,

and men of that class, were too proud to accept of salvation at the hands of so meek and lowly a Saviour. This was as if men dying of hunger or of thirst, should refuse food or water unless brought to them by men clothed in the gorgeous raiment worn in king's palaces. At the same time some of the wealthy and noble were called—the wealthy publican, the "honourable counsellor," and the dignified ruler. All the honours of the Jewish church and state awaited Saul, had he continued to be the zealous Pharisee and fierce persecutor. But Christ called him to be his servant and apostle, that he might show to the world that his Spirit was powerful enough to convert the proudest heart, and his mercy large enough to forgive the greatest of sinners, and that his gospel was sufficient to interest the most gifted minds, and important enough to employ the noblest talents in its constant service.

And thus it was at Rome. While some were converted from the household of the emperor, and from other exalted stations, the great majority of the Christian converts during the first three centuries were from

the humbler classes. While the doctrine of Christ crucified was to the philosophers and patricians of Rome foolishness, it was, to many a poor plebeian, unlettered labourer and oppressed slave, the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation.

Let us learn a practical lesson for ourselves in this respect. We sometimes envy those who are above us, and are discontented that we are not as learned, or as rich, or as much admired or honoured as they are. But let us remember that the best possible position in life for us is that which is most favourable to our becoming true Christians. It is among the characteristics of the Christian faith, that it calls its disciples from among the lowly and despised. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." How much more blessed a servant in the family of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, in their humble dwelling at the foot of Mount Olivet, far from city pleasures and city temptations, when the Lord Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners, came often to visit the house, and left his blessing upon the household, than any citizen of Rome then dwell-

ing in the most magnificent of her palaces, though he were endowed with the genius of Virgil, lived in the elegant refinement of Mæcenas, or exercised the power of Cæsar. Happy is the condition, however humble, of those who are loving and serving Christ; blessed the place, however lowly, from which the Saviour is taking jewels for his crown!

There was much in the national character of the Romans proud and stoical, much in their history full of violence and usurpation, much in the moral state of the aristocracy sensual beyond example, much in the prevalent philosophical systems universally skeptical—to harden the hearts of the higher classes against the gospel. The poor were more ready to embrace the mercy offered them. Of these the sand-diggers and miners—those who were employed in the subterranean excavations of which we have spoken—were a distinct class, not unlike the miners and colliers in England at the present day. They were also a very numerous class. Many of them were probably slaves, toward whom the Roman law and the Roman customs allowed every kind of

cruelty and insult without the least redress. Neither the laws nor public opinion interfered to protect them; and the other labourers in the quarries were probably treated but little better than the slaves.

To this class, as to others in Rome, some Christians came (perhaps one just returned from his visit to Jerusalem and from the scenes of Pentecost) with the glad tidings of that one Friend who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. He had sent out his messengers in his name "to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and restoring of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bound, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." All day long they were shut up to their hard work under ground, amid the gloom of darkness, save the feeble light of a lamp or torch; and excluded from the joyous influence of the light of day and all the beauties of creation which it reveals to man; but the kind-hearted Christian, full of the spirit of his compassionate Master, came down to tell them about that better world,

where the weary are at rest, and where there is no night, and no more sorrow. It is not strange that here the gospel found many hearts open to receive it; and we have abundant evidence that among these humble workmen and their families there were found many of the most grateful and consistent and faithful members of the church of Christ at Rome.

Here is an engraving of one of this class, not from a picture drawn by the imagination, but copied from one painted on the very stone which was found at the mouth of the grave or cell in which he was buried. Observe the inscription in Latin over the top. It reads thus: "Diogenes, the Fossor, buried in peace on the eighth day before the kalends of October."

The term kalends means the first day of the month. This *fossor*, or miner, was therefore buried on the 23d of September.

Notice the implements used in his work; the pick-axe upon his shoulder, in his other hand the lamp, held by the spike with which it was fastened to the rock while he worked, the compasses used in marking out the cells,

Diogenes, the Fossor. p. 60.

and several other tools adapted to this kind of labour.

On the sides of the room in which he stands, are the slabs closing the openings into the cells or graves. On each side of the inscription is a picture of a dove with an olive-branch, the common symbol of Christian peace. On the left shoulder, and on the lower part of the tunic, are figures, which probably are the Greek letter *X* beginning the name of Christ; whence it is concluded, without doubt, that Diogenes was a Christian, but of what century it is impossible to say.

It will be seen at a glance that the whole picture indicates only lowliness and poverty. But it is, undoubtedly, a representative of the workmen best clad and best treated.

At the end of this chapter is a rude sketch, and probably representing the larger number of them. There is no class of pictures in the catacombs more numerous than that representing the *fossors*.

The early church at Rome contained, as we have said, many of the poor and the heavy laden besides the labourers in the dark and damp catacombs. We have, not

only in the writings of the Christian fathers, but also in the works of pagan authors, many allusions to the inferior condition (as to wealth and rank) of most of those who constituted the church at that period.

Celsus was an infidel, and a scoffer at Christianity, who lived from the middle to the latter part of the second century. In addition to the arguments of a false philosophy, he resorted to that low form of ridicule which is the most mean and cowardly mode of opposing another, and always betrays weakness, either in the person who uses it or in the cause he is endeavouring to support. In this spirit he seized hold of the fact that "not many wise, not many noble, were called," and made it the occasion of the sneering sarcasm, "Wool-workers, leather-dressers, cobblers, the most illiterate of mankind, are zealous preachers of the gospel!"

It is often easier to insult an opinion than to refute it. We know that there was much gross misrepresentation in the statements made by the first adversaries of Christianity as to the intellectual as well as moral character of its disciples. The preaching of the gospel was not committed to agents

wholly unfitted by narrowness of mind, or ignorance, for their noble work. When its divine Author called fishermen and a publican to be his chosen apostles, he became himself their teacher, opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and gave them treasures of wisdom by the revelation of his Spirit. And they, when sending forth others, constantly charged them to be diligent in every mode of personal improvement, to give themselves to reading and meditation, that their profiting therein might appear to all. Such was the standard of the primitive teacher. And yet it is also true that there were many ignorant and illiterate whom grace had raised from moral degradation, whose hearts were kindled to grateful zeal, and whose lips were opened to tell to their fellows in the quarries and in the slave mart and in the streets and fields, the story of Christ, and what he had done to bless poor sinners like themselves. If all the preachers of the gospel had been thus illiterate, and all the believers thus lowly, one of them might have replied to this taunt of Celsus, "I am sorry that all besides these lowly classes are too proud or too wicked to accept of the

gospel! I am sorry that the Son of God counts so few of them worthy to be his followers!"

But let that taunt of Celsus stand. It is one of the many evidences of the truth of our holy religion, for it discloses one of the strongest of the prejudices by which it was opposed in the minds of the haughty Romans, to whom, as well as to the imaginative Greek and the indolent Oriental, the gospel came, humbling all pride and casting down every high imagination that exalted itself before it. If it had not, indeed, been of God, how could it have increased from a small and unpromising beginning, under circumstances so unfavourable, with such rapidity and power, that within less than two hundred years from that time, it not only comprehended in its ranks the most learned and most noble of the people, but sat, with an undisputed title, upon the imperial throne?

There is another and a pleasing anecdote that illustrates the position in the world of a large number of the early Christian church.

About the middle of the third century, and while the Christians were suffering cruel

persecutions under the Emperor Decius, there was a deacon in the church at Rome named Laurentius. In the primitive church the deacons were guardians of the poor, and distributed among them the money which the other members contributed for that purpose. An officer of the emperor having observed that considerable sums of money passed through the hands of Laurentius in this manner, concluded that if the church gave away so much to the poor, its treasury must be very abundantly filled, and he resolved to seize upon its hoards in the name of the emperor.

Accordingly Laurentius was commanded by him to deliver up the treasures of the church for confiscation. The deacon asked for three days in which to collect them. His request was granted. During this time he gathered together into the courts and porches of one of the churches, the aged, the lame, the blind, the diseased, and the poor, a large multitude, but consisting of those only who had received the charities of the church. Then he called upon the Roman officer with the invitation, "Come, see the treasures of our God. You shall see a great court full

of vessels of gold, and talents heaped up in the porches." The officer followed, and the assembled poor were shown to him. "Behold now," said Laurentius, "the treasures I promised you. I add to these the widows and orphans; these are our pearls and precious stones, the crown of the church. Take this wealth for Rome, for the emperor, and for yourself."

Having referred to this Christian deacon, we will add that he is called in the calendar of Papal saints, St. Lawrence. He suffered martyrdom under Decius, A. D. 254. The particular circumstances of his martyrdom come to us through the legends of the monks of the Middle Ages, who delighted, in the gloom of their prison-like cells, to imagine the most horrible pictures of torture, sometimes described as the work of pagan persecutors, sometimes as the self-inflicted penance of those who thought they could thus secure their own salvation. Their story is that this faithful servant of Christ and of his church was roasted to death over a slow fire! In the multitude of falsehoods with which the Roman martyrology is filled, we have no certainty "by what death he glori-

fied God." But if it were, indeed, such a death of fearful agony, better its temporary pangs, followed by peace and joy eternal, than to breathe out the life gently upon a couch of down, and then sink into "the fire that never shall be quenched."

CHAPTER V.

PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS AT ROME.

We now come upon a portion of our history full of events to excite both painful sympathy and joyful thanksgiving. Blessed be the Author and Finisher of our faith, whose power and grace sustained so many in the day of fiery trial, who counted not their lives dear unto them for His name's sake!

"The Christian church has ever shown a disposition to distinguish in a peculiar manner those who have shed their blood in defence of the faith. The honour paid to them in different times and places has varied; but, while truth is valued among men, it is impossible that they should be lightly esteemed, who, facing torments and death with resolution, purchased, not for themselves but for others, the blessings of religious freedom. Notwithstanding the calum-

nies of enemies, and the inventions of mistaken friends, between which truth has materially suffered, it is certain that these soldiers of Christ have from time to time achieved the most glorious and permanent triumphs: in the great assaults made on heathenism or superstition they have led the attack as the forlorn hope, and fallen victorious:—

> 'Strange conquest, where the conqueror must die,
> And he is slain that wins the victory;'—

but in this they only shared the fate of their glorious Leader, a fate which might naturally be expected to await all his followers. What gratitude do we not owe to those who fought such fearful battles to leave us in unhoped-for liberty and ease?"

"But honours of a more substantial nature than any rendered by man, awaited the faithful martyr. 'To each victor is promised,' says Tertullian, 'the tree of life and exemption from the second death; the hidden manna with the white stone, and an unknown name; the power of the iron rod, and the brightness of the morning star; to be clothed in white; not to be blotted out of the book

of life; to be made a pillar in the temple of God, inscribed with the name of his God and Lord, and of the heavenly Jerusalem; and to sit down with the Lord on his throne.'

"It is a question not easy of solution, what induced the Romans to persecute so violently the Christian sect. The conflagration of Rome, falsely attributed by Nero to their agency, was first made the pretext for punishing them; but the accusation was not generally believed at the time, and the extreme severity of their tortures produced a strong feeling in their favour. When we review the small portion of the history of the Church contained in the New Testament, from the time when Pilate washed his hands of our Saviour's blood, to the rescue of Paul from the Jews by the chief captain Lysias, we find in almost every instance in which the Christians came in contact with the Romans, that the latter appeared as their just, though often lukewarm, protectors.

"When Festus left Paul bound, it was to do the Jews a pleasure; when Paul appealed to Cæsar, it was to escape their malignity. It was a Roman who thought it unreasonable to send a Christian prisoner without a

crime imputed to him; a Roman who, appreciating the eloquence and truth of the apostle, trembled at his preaching. It may, therefore, excite our surprise to find this equitable policy exchanged for the spirit of extermination which afterward appeared among the pagan Romans; for no change in the early Christian church took place, which could render it an object of reasonable aversion to its enemies."*

This intense malignity toward Christians, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter," becomes yet more strange in contrast with the general national policy. They had not only allowed to every conquered people the free exercise of their religious rites, however absurd or grossly offensive to their own tastes, but they had allowed the shrines of foreign gods, with attending throngs of priests and noisy ceremonies, to be established, even under the shadow of the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter. It seems, indeed, as if they sometimes regarded with satisfaction the increase of the catalogue of gods, as the Papist does an addition to the

* Maitland's "Church in the Catacombs," p. 84.

calendar of saints, or any pagan ceremonies in the services of his worship, as is witnessed in heathen countries at the present day, wherever they have introduced their religion. An earnest devotee, or a terrified profligate, seeking some other helper than He "upon whom only help is laid,"—to abridge the pains of purgatory, or save from the eternal flames,—may look at the 1128 names of canonized saints found in the Paris catalogue of 1847, with a special confidence that by purchasing the mediation of many of them he can certainly escape; and we know that many old Romans in like manner added the worship of Egyptian or Syrian deities to that of their national gods, changing as fear or fancy suggested. There is no improbability in the statement made by an early writer, (but not of the best historical authority,) that Tiberius proposed to the senate to instal our own Lord Jesus Christ as one of the gods of the national worship.

What then was the reason that the religion of love and purity so soon became the object of such peculiar hatred? The answer is to be found in its central truths and in their immediate influence on every heart

that received them. The Athenians, passing by the place of their devotions, and seeing an altar just erected, with this inscription, "To the unknown God," regarded it as no denial of their own deities, but only the addition of yet one more to their "gods many and lords many." But the apostle proclaimed the One only living and true God, the sole object of religious reverence and obedience, and visiting with wrath all who acknowledged or worshipped any other. It was not the first time that monotheism, the system of one only supreme God, had been taught at Athens. A few philosophers had suggested it as possible, or reasoned about it as probable, without producing much excitement among the priesthood or the people. But the apostle's preaching went farther, testifying of "the loving-kindness of God our Saviour towards man;" how in the days of his flesh he went about doing good, lived to bless, and died to save; and though again enthroned in glory, was still present as an almighty friend to every repenting sinner who would trust in him and obey him. Before such truths, when received into the heart of Greek or Roman,

every other object of worship fell, maimed and shattered, as Dagon before the ark of God. Their language then was, "Whom have I in heaven but thee!" "Whether we live, we live to the Lord; and whether we die, we die to the Lord; that living or dying we may be the Lord's."

With the eyes thus opened, and the heart thus warmed, the new disciple went forth to persuade others to receive the same truths, and love and obey the same Saviour. If successful in his attempt to influence them, they, too, forsook the idol temples, and uttered their protest against the systems of falsehood and rites of superstition and pollution. Well might the many who "had all their wealth" by these systems fear this exclusive and intolerant faith, so destructive of them all. And in that century, as always, not the priests and craftsmen only, whose selfish interests were endangered, but "all that did evil hated the light." The old mythologies and profane rites of Rome seem to us so absurd that we probably underrate the degree and intensity of their religious zeal. But the worshippers of cats at Pelusium were the most fierce zealots in Egypt,

and ready to wreak a terrible vengeance upon one who should insult their deities.

We have thus alluded to the reasons for the bitterness of every old unbeliever against the gospel. In the Roman this was strengthened by the intimate connection always existing between his religion and the State.

But, although hated and defamed by the majority of the people as soon as its claims were understood, it was not until about thirty years after our Saviour's death that the rulers became its savage persecutors.

"The persecution of Nero, A. D. 64–65, (the first which the followers of the new faith suffered under the Roman emperors,) has been described by Tacitus, and alluded to by Suetonius and by Juvenal. The great classical historian, who was living in the time of Nero, may himself have been a witness of the horrible scenes he describes. Juvenal was contemporary with Tacitus, and Suetonius wrote in the same age.

"Every reader of history will remember that the tyrant Nero was suspected of having given orders, and prepared the means, for that terrible conflagration which reduced a

large portion of the city of Rome to cinders and ashes.

"'To put an end to this report,' says Tacitus, 'Nero laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishments, upon a set of people who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and called, by the vulgar, Christians. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, thus checked for a while, broke out again and spread, not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither every thing bad upon the earth finds its way and is practised.

"'Some who confessed their sect, were first seized, and afterward, by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery; for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs; some were crucified; and others were wrapped in pitched shirts, and set on fire, when the day closed, that they might serve as lights to

illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions, and exhibited at the same time a mock Circensian entertainment, being a spectator of the whole, in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacle from his car.'

"Thus were realized the foretellings of our Saviour. He had said to those disciples—'They shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.' 'They shall lay hands on you, and persecute you.' 'The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.'

"Under the cruel, brutal Domitian, who caused himself to be called 'God and Lord,' the second great persecution took place. This was A. D. 95. Other massacres followed in the reigns of Trajan, Adrian, and Severus. Under the successors of Severus there was a calm, which lasted from A. D. 197 to A. D.

235; and, during these thirty-eight years, the Christians, who had hitherto been compelled to worship in sequestered places, were allowed to build churches and humble oratories, or places of prayer, in Rome and other cities. The next persecution took place under Maximinus, the crowned boor from Thrace, A. D. 235. Fifteen years later, Decius, the fierce barbarian from Pannonia, who had revolted against his master, and made himself emperor, rekindled the fire, which is said to have blazed more furiously and to a wider extent than ever it had done before.

"The Diocletian persecution, commonly called the *tenth* and *last* of the great persecutions of the church under the emperors, was intended to extirpate the new faith, and to drown it in its own blood. It commenced A. D. 303, at Nicomedia, in Asia Minor, where the emperor then held his court; and was provoked by the jealousies and fears of the unbelievers at the vast and still rapidly increasing numbers of the worshippers of Christ. The churches were broken open, the Scriptures were seized and burned, and a decree went forth that every

Christian temple within the limits of the empire should be demolished to its very foundation.

"From Nicomedia the persecution extended to all parts of Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the African coast; and, from the same original centre, it reached Byzantium, (now Constantinople,) Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Rome. If, under fear of torture, apostates were made, death was braved by many thousands, and by people in masses. In an unnamed town in Phrygia the inhabitants, at the approach of the unconverted troops of the emperor, threw themselves into their strong church. The soldiers set fire to the edifice; but still the Christians would not come forth or utter one word of recantation, and—men, women, and children—they were all burned alive, and buried under the ruins and ashes of their temple. In other places the issues from the streets occupied by the Christians were barricaded and quite blocked up, and the houses were set on fire and burned with all in them; in others, the believers were bound together with ropes, and

were cast or driven into the sea by hundreds.

"In Italy alone, the number of believers had so increased by this time, that the destruction of them made a visible and fearful void in the population! Villages, towns, boroughs, and great cities are described as being strewed, and in places filled, with their dead bodies. From the Tiber to the Straits of Messina on the one side, and to the foot of the Alps on the other, there were, probably, few places but had their martyrs at this sad time. These were days for the Christians to flee again to deserts, and to dens, and to caves in the earth, and to call upon the crags of the mountains to topple over and hide them."*

We have no disposition to repeat the terrible descriptions of the sufferings of different martyrs in these centuries of persecution, when human ingenuity exhausted itself in attempts to invent new methods of torture. But we will refer to one place wet with the blood of thousands of Christians, where their torture and death were made an

* Mac Farlane's "Catacombs of Rome," p. 16–27.

exhibition for the amusement of an immense multitude of spectators. We allude to the Flavian amphitheatre, or the Coliseum, which has already been mentioned. From the engraving we here give of its present appearance, some idea may be formed of its beauty and grandeur when it was new and entire, at or near the close of the first century. It was in the form of an ellipse, its greater diameter being six hundred and fifteen feet, the lesser five hundred and ten feet, and its external circumference about one thousand seven hundred feet, or nearly six hundred yards. It was one hundred and sixty-four feet high, composed of four stories, each story being a different order of architecture. It enclosed a large space, or arena, open to the sky; there being, however, an awning extended over the seats of the spectators, to protect them from the sun and rain. The wild beasts, whose bloody conflicts were to afford amusement to the people, were kept in cells, which opened upon the arena by doors in the wall surrounding it. This wall, and the railing upon it, were so high that no wild beast, however active, could spring over it. Above

this wall, in seats prepared expressly for them, sat the magistrates, senators, and other distinguished persons; and from these seats a balcony projected out into the arena, from which the emperors viewed the spectacles. From this inner wall back to the outer wall, the whole vast space was lined with marble seats, rising above each other, sixty or more rows of the same sweeping around the whole circuit; and these were sufficiently capacious to hold from eighty to one hundred thousand spectators, and were often filled to overflowing.

This immense amphitheatre was erected, and these multitudes assembled sometimes, to witness the contests of savage beasts, brought from all parts of the world for that purpose, but more often the bloody conflicts of man with man, or of man with wild beasts, as the Spaniards of this day assemble to witness their national barbarous sport of "bull-fighting." A large number of men, captives or criminals, were trained for this work of blood, by the name of gladiators.

When the persecution of the Christians became more fierce, the emperors and ma-

Martyrdom of Ignatius. p. 83.

gistrates conceived the idea of bringing them into the amphitheatre, where all who wished might enjoy the cruel sport of seeing them torn limb from limb by ferocious beasts. Sometimes, however, the beasts, more merciful than their masters, would not be made the executioners, and the gladiator was compelled to descend into the arena and despatch the victim with his sword. In these cruel exhibitions, probably thousands of Christians died, while the immense throng of spectators, male and female, raised a shout of fiendlike malice and triumphant exultation.

Upon entering this amphitheatre at such a time as we have been describing, we should have witnessed a scene like that of the martyrdom of Ignatius. He had been a prominent Christian, and therefore the enemies of Christianity not only wished his death, but wished to see him die. He was brought to Rome from the distant city of Antioch. He was not reluctant to come, for he was one of those who are ready to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

On his way to Rome he found time to write epistles to his flock at Rome, in which

he exhorted them to stand fast in their love to Christ, and not to weep for him, but rather rejoice that he was counted worthy to suffer for his Lord.

When at last he was brought into the dreadful arena, and just before the lions were let loose upon him, he looked up into the faces of the vast multitude that filled the amphitheatre, and calmly said, "Romans, spectators of this present scene, I am here, not because of any crime, nor to absolve myself from any charge of wickedness, *but to follow God*, by the love of whom I am impelled, and whom I long for irrepressibly. For I am his wheat, and must be ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may become his pure bread."

It was in a similar way, but in a different city, that those noble females, Felicitas and Perpetua, suffered death for their Redeemer's sake—who left their name and their praise in all the Christian world.

Of the early Christian martyrs at Rome we have sufficient evidence that great numbers were buried in the catacombs. But there are very few references to the persecutions, in the records found there. Of the

many thousands whose graves are there, research has brought to light comparatively few tablets containing certain evidence that they marked the resting-place of those who died by the hands of pagan violence. The larger portion of them, and those the most ancient, have no inscriptions, or merely the names rudely carved. The years of persecution, such as those of Nero, Decius, and Diocletian, were not the times for preparing costly monumental tablets. Silence also was necessary when a record of the truth would have caused outrage to the dead and danger to the surviving, as there is no doubt the catacombs were often visited by the pagans.

There are, indeed, many tablets which have upon them sculptures, or paintings of the supposed instruments of torture by which they suffered, as hooks, pincers, and the like, some of which, more probably, are only representations of the implements used in their trade or labour. There are deposited, also, in the Museum of the Vatican, a variety of savage-looking iron instruments, which seem to have been made on purpose to tear the flesh from the body,

so as to produce the keenest anguish possible; and which are said to have been taken from the catacombs, and to be the very instruments by which one or another saint suffered death. A palm branch, which appears very often on the tablets, has been interpreted as the symbol of the martyr's triumph, founded on the vision of the glorified described by the prisoner of Patmos. This would have been more in accordance with the spirit and temper of the early Christians than engraved words of malediction or instruments of torture. The cheerfulness with which they regarded death, even in its most terrible forms, when endured for their Master's sake, and their gentle charity, even to their fiercest persecutors, are manifest in all that has come down to us. Their constant prayer was that their enemies might be brought, by the same grace bestowed on themselves, to receive and love the faith which they were then seeking to destroy.

But let us read a few inscriptions, or epitaphs, which connect the sleepers in the catacombs directly with the persecutions. Here is one:

"PRIMITIUS, IN PEACE; AFTER MANY TORMENTS, A MOST VALIANT MARTYR. HE LIVED ABOUT THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS. HIS WIFE RAISED THIS TO HER DEAREST HUSBAND, THE WELL-DESERVING."

The following two are of a later date, but in the same spirit:

"PAULUS WAS PUT TO DEATH IN TORTURES, IN ORDER THAT HE MIGHT LIVE IN ETERNAL BLISS"

"CLEMENTIA, TORTURED, DEAD. SLEEPS: WILL RISE."

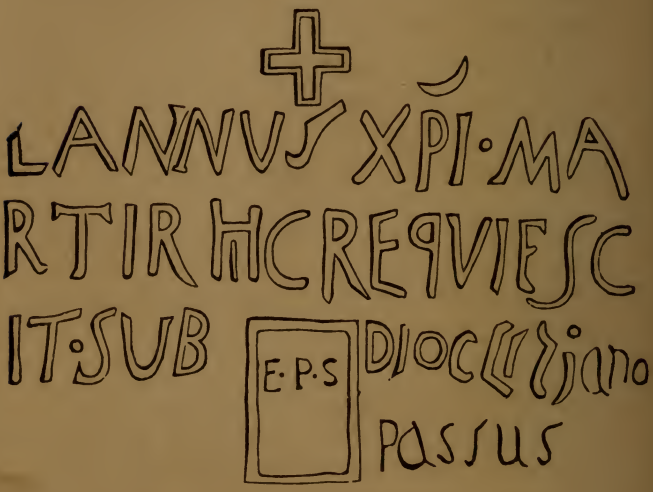
There is one record that seems to show that the martyr was first compelled to drink poison, and this proving ineffectual, he was despatched with a sword. The inscription is upon the outside of a cup, which was taken from his tomb. It runs thus:

"THE DEADLY DRAUGHT DARED NOT PRESENT TO CONSTANS THE CROWN WHICH THE STEEL WAS PERMITTED TO OFFER."

A few specify the time when the sufferer died, or the emperor during whose reign he suffered.

Here is one, of which we will give a *fac-*

simile of the original, the letters being somewhat abridged. It may serve as a fair specimen of a great number.



It is translated thus:

"Lannus, Christ's Martyr, rests here. He suffered under Diocletian."

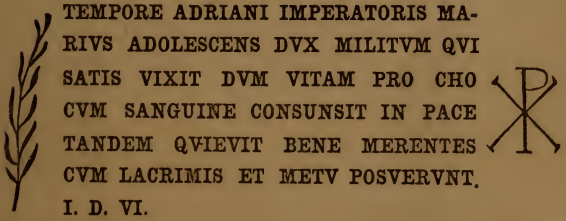
The letters E. P. S. upon the tablet stand for these words, *et posteris suis*, "and for his posterity," showing that this tomb had been legally secured to his family. It will be noticed that these letters are manifestly

of later inscription It is probable that after the time of peril to the church had passed, by the accession of Constantine, his family obtained the privilege of sharing the consecrated tomb.

Although the following inscription does not contain any date, we learn from other sources that Gordianus suffered in the brief persecution under Julian.

"HERE LIES GORDIANUS, DEPUTY OF GAUL, WHO WAS EXECUTED FOR THE FAITH. WITH ALL HIS FAMILY: THEY REST IN PEACE. THEOPHILA, A HANDMAID, SET UP THIS."

Here is another:


TEMPORE ADRIANI IMPERATORIS MA-
RIVS ADOLESCENS DVX MILITVM QVI
SATIS VIXIT DVM VITAM PRO CHO
CVM SANGVINE CONSUNSIT IN PACE
TANDEM QVIEVIT BENE MERENTES
CVM LACRIMIS ET METV POSVERVNT.
I. D. VI.

"In Christ. In the time of the Emperor Adrian, Marius, a young military officer, who lived long enough, as he shed his blood for Christ, and died in peace. His friends set up this with tears and in fear."

This proves, not only that Marius himself died a martyr, but also that his surviving friends were themselves in danger at the time when this tablet was placed there.

Prudentius, a Spanish Christian poet, visited Rome in the fourth century, and thus describes the appearance of some of the tablet stones in the catacombs at that time:

"We have seen, in the city of Romulus, innumerable remains of saints. You ask, Valerian, what epitaphs are chiselled upon the tombs, and what are the names of those buried?—A question difficult for me to answer, so great a host of the just did the impious rage of the heathen sweep away when Trojan Rome worshipped her country's gods.

"Many sepulchres, marked with letters, display the name of the martyr, or some anagram. There are, also, dumb stones, closing silent tombs, which tell only the number buried within. So that we know how many human bodies lie in the heap, though we read no name belonging to them. I remember finding that sixty were buried under one mound, whose names Christ

alone preserves, as those of his peculiar friends."

Here is a specimen of a tablet like some referred to by Prudentius:

"Marcella and five hundred and fifty martyrs of Christ."

There are in some portions of the catacombs deep pits, which were the graves of many. Whether this tablet was placed near such a pit we cannot ascertain. It may have been erected only as a brief memorial of so many Christians who had suffered martyrdom in Rome under one emperor, or at one time, whose bones may have been deposited in different cells, or even in different cemeteries.

We have transcribed enough of these records to show the relation between the persecutions which occurred upon the surface and these places beneath, where the surviving friends of the martyrs laid away their remains to their peaceful sleep.

We prefer to separate from the rest of the chapter a brief notice of a subject to which

we have alluded, which is necessarily connected with our inquiries as to the graves of the victims of persecution:—we mean the deep pits often used for the burial of the poor by the Romans, and still used by the brutal government of Naples. There is no doubt that the bodies of hundreds of Christian martyrs were committed to these horrible receptacles, there to lie undistinguished till the earth shall give up all her dead. They were called "puticuli," from their resemblance to wells.

"Into such deep shafts the ancient Romans threw the dead bodies of their slaves and malefactors, by scores and by hundreds. Such are found in the catacombs. Most of these deep cavities are closed, but some of those which remain open present, at the distance of a few feet from the floor of the crypts, a horrible, compact, condensed mass of human skulls and bones, all white or grayish, and looking as if calcined. The Romans threw quicklime into these frightful pits, to hasten the destruction of the bodies. Precisely the same practices prevail at Naples in the well-known Campo Santo, (or 'holy field,') the cemetery of

the poor. There, a large quadrangular place is enclosed by stone walls; the soil underneath is tufa; in this are sunk three hundred and sixty-five pozzi, or great graves, one for every day in the year; the entrance into these death-chambers is on a level with the ground, and narrow, like the mouth of a well. All the poor who expire in the hospitals, and all the paupers who die in the populous city on one day, and have none to bury them, are carried to this spot, and thrown pell-mell into one of the pits, without a rag to cover them! I have counted in one of these pits as many as fifteen bodies thus disposed of, and there were others beneath which I could not see. At sunset a quantity of lime is thrown into the pit, and the mouth of it is shut up by a closely fitting stone slab; that sepulchre then remains undisturbed and unopened until the following year, and the one next to it, or marked next in date, is opened on the morrow morning to receive its annual supply of dead. At the expiration of the year of rest, nothing is left in the pit but lime, skulls, and bones; and when its turn comes round again, when the closing stone

is removed, and its hideous maw re-opened, there is room, and to spare, for the reception of all the poor, friendless dead that day. It is then again shut up until the following year, and so, in succession, year after year.

"The number of the separate graves in one of the larger of the Roman catacombs, as that of St. Sebastian, taking all the crypts and the excavations under excavations, is enormous; and the amount of the dead deposited there defies rational calculation. But who could count the contents of those deep and horrible pits in them, filled almost to the brim?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE CATACOMBS A REFUGE FROM PERSECUTION.

It is reported of the cruel Nero, that when he was himself a wretched fugitive from the fury of his enraged subjects, he was advised to secrete himself in the catacombs; and that he replied that it would be quite soon enough to go there after he was dead.

Rienzi, who was a revolutionary patriot of Rome in the fourteenth century, but who failed in his attempt to restore liberty to his country, being also advised to take refuge from his pursuers in the catacombs, quoted the answer of Nero, saying that he would not go under the ground while he was living. But there were times when these cheerless excavations gave shelter to many of the living as well as of the dead.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, xi. 38, the writer, in speaking of the faithful of old, who had suffered persecution, says, "They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." David and Elijah fled to such places of refuge from the violence of Jewish kings; and thousands in this way escaped from death during the terrible persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian tyrant. The words of the apostle were an exact description of what the Christians would soon suffer. During the successive persecutions which they endured for several centuries, we learn, from various sources, that they often took refuge in the catacombs—in these artificial dens and caves of the earth. They would probably be well acquainted with all these intricate passages under ground, as many of their number had been employed there, and others had often visited fellow-disciples who were thus employed. They would also there be specially secure from their pursuers, as no one could possibly trace his way through these labyrinths unless he had himself been employed in them or had guides accustomed to them. What-

ever, therefore, his hatred to the Christians, he would be slow to follow them into retreats where he might lose his own way, and, in consequence, his life.

Hence, in times of peril, the catacombs would be the most natural retreat of the fugitive Christians, and also their safest asylum.

Hear what a writer of the fourth century says of the entrance to one of these excavations in his day:—

"Among the cultivated grounds, not far outside the walls, lies a deep cavern with dark recesses. A descending path, with winding steps, leads through the dim turnings, and the daylight, entering by the mouth of the cavern, somewhat illumines the first part of the way. But the darkness grows deeper as we advance, till we meet with openings cut in the roof of the passages, admitting light from above," &c.

Into such dark and mysterious passages as these the enemies of the Christian would not be over anxious to pursue him. Hither then he would flee, and wait till the storm was overpast. Bitter persecutions did not generally continue long in the same place;

and frequently, while the storm was raging, it was only the prominent members of the church whose lives were sought by the persecutors. So that while these were secreted beyond the reach of the persecutor, their Christian friends could easily find them, and furnish them with necessary food.

And there were springs, or wells of water, in different parts of the catacombs, some of which still remain. In the time of Diocletian, one man is said to have lived eight years in the catacombs. The early history of the church is filled with traditions of persons, both men and women, who lived for a longer or a shorter period under ground. Some of them were traced by the persecutors, and suffered martyrdom there. It is said that, in one case, a large number of Christians had assembled in a remote branch of these caverns, when their pursuers, having learned where they were, cruelly walled up the only passage leading to them; and they all perished together, by the lingering death of famine.

The many traditions current on this point leave no doubt of the fact of their frequently taking refuge in these subterranean re-

cesses At first the magistrates may not have known that Christians secreted themselves here; but, in later times, they were perfectly aware of it, for we find still in existence the edicts of persecuting emperors forbidding the Christians to assemble there, as well as the later edicts of other emperors, who were favourable to the Christians, permitting them to return thither at their pleasure.

There is one affecting epitaph found in the catacombs, that may be introduced here. It refers to a persecution that occurred about the middle of the second century. The epitaph itself may have been composed somewhat later, and placed over the grave of one who was known to have suffered at the time alluded to, as, at this day, a new monument is frequently erected over the grave of a person who died fifty or a hundred years ago. The reader will notice in it one brief clause which proves, not only that the persecuted frequently took refuge in the catacombs and even worshipped there, but also that the persecutors sometimes followed them even into these deep retreats.

"In Christ. Alexander is not dead, but lives above the stars, and his body rests in this tomb. He ended his life under the Emperor Antonine, who, although he might have foreseen that great benefit would result from his services, rendered to him hatred instead of favour. For while on his knees, and about to sacrifice to the true God, he was led away to execution. Oh sad times! in which, among sacred rites and prayers, *not even in caverns could we be safe.* What can be more wretched than such a life? and what than such a death? where they cannot be buried by their friends and relations!—At length they sparkle in heaven."

Another short sentence ends the inscription, but it is, probably by some mistake of the sculptor, quite unintelligible.

In the frontispiece of this volume is a sketch of one of the interior passage-ways of the catacombs. The reader will observe, on the left, tiers of recesses from the floor to the roof of the passage-way, each recess made to contain one body, or more. Beyond these two tiers another passage branches off to the left, upon the right-hand side of which will be observed two similar recesses. Still farther on is a party of visiters coming toward us. Immediately in front of them, and on the floor of the main passage, is an opening and stairway down

into a still lower story of the catacombs. From this a wild-looking person is coming up with torch in hand. Perhaps he is one of the original workmen here, a *fossor*, and his look of surprise may be caused by his meeting unexpectedly with these Roman visiters from above ground.

This engraving may help us to understand how persons who were well acquainted with all these passage-ways could escape from pursuers; and how the pursuers would be in danger either of being lost in these dark and winding avenues, or of stumbling unexpectedly into one of those openings, through the floor, into the dismal vaults beneath. Many of the excavations have been closed, so that some of the retreats of the earliest Christians are now inaccessible. But in order to give the reader a vivid idea of the numerous and intricate windings of the subterranean passages still open, and also of the danger of visiting them without a guide, we will introduce here the version by an English author of a part of a French poem by Abbe de Lille, founded on the adventures of M. Robert, an artist, who had ventured rashly alone into the catacombs

"Eager to know the secrets of the place,
The holy cradle of our Christian race,
A youthful artist threads these inmost cells,
And lowest crypts, where darkness ever dwells.
No friend to cheer him, and no guide to lead,
He boldly trusts a flambeau and a thread.
Brave and alone he cherishes his light,
And trusts the clue will lead him back aright.
Onward he goes along the low-arched caves,
Crowded with martyrs' relics and their graves;
Through palaces of death, by countless tombs,
Through awful silence, and through thick'ning glooms;
Yet pausing oft, as walls and slabs impart
Some lesson of the earliest Christian art,
Or some black chasm warns him to beware,
And choose his steps, and trim his torch with care.
Onward he goes, nor takes a note of time,
Impell'd, enchanted, in this dismal clime;
Thrilling with awe, but yet untouched by fear,
He passes on from dreary unto drear!
The crypts diverge, the labyrinths are cross'd,—
He will return. Alas! his clue is lost!
Dropp'd from his hand, while tracing out an urn,
The faithless string is gone, and dimly burn
The flambeau's threads. He gropes, but gropes in vain,
Recedes, advances, and turns back again;
He halts, he moves, he thinks, he rushes on,
But only finds that issue is there none.
Crypt tangles crypt, a perfect network weaves
This gloomy labyrinth of horrid caves.
He mutters to himself, he shouts, he calls,
And echo answers from a hundred walls.
That awful echo doubles his dismay,
That grimmer darkness leads his head astray.

Cold at his heart! His breath, now quick, now slow
Sounds in that silence like a wail of wo!
Oh! for one cheering ray of heaven's bright sun,
Which, through long hours, his glorious course hath run
Since he came here! And now his torch's light
Flickers, expires in smoke—and all is night!
Thick-coming fancies trouble all his sense,
He strives, but vainly strives, to drive them thence;
Cleaves his dried tongue unto the drier roof,
Nor word, nor breath hath he at his behoof;
That dying torch last shone upon a grave,
That grave his tomb, for who shall help and save?
Alone! Yet not alone, for phantoms throng
His burning brain, and chase the crypts along.
And other spectres rush into the void—
Blessings neglected, leisure misemploy'd,
And passions left to rise and rage at will,
And faults, called follies, but were vices still;
And wild caprice, and words at random spoken,
By which kind hearts were wounded, though not broken,
Bootless resolves, repentance late and vain,—
All these and more come thundering through his brain;
Condensing in one single moment rife,
The sins of all his days, the history of his life;
And death at hand! Not that which heroes hail,
On battle-field, when 'Victory!' swells the gale,
And love of country, Glory standing by,
Make it a joy and rapture so to die!
But creeping death, slow, anguish'd, and obscure,
A famish'd death, no mortal may endure!
But this his end! our prison'd artist's fate,
He young, he joyous, and but now elate
With every hope that warms the human breast,
Before experience tells that life's a jest;

Full of his art, of projects, and of love,
Must he expire, while creeping things above,
On the earth's surface, in the eye of day,
Revel in life, nor feel this drear dismay?
But hark! a step? Alas, no step is there!
But see! a glimmering light? Oh! foul despair!
No ray pervades this darkness, grim and rare.
He staggers, reels, and falls, and falling prone,
Grapples the ground where he must die alone;
But in that fall touches his outstretch'd hand
That precious clue the labyrinth can command;
Lost long, but now regain'd! O happy wight,
Gather thy strength, and haste to life and light!
And up he rises, quick, but cautious grown,
And threads the mazes by that string alone;
Comes into light, and feels the fanning breeze,
Sees the bright stars, and drops upon his knees;
His first free breath is uttered in a prayer,
Such as none say but those who've known despair!
And never were the stars of heaven so sheen
Except to those who'd dwelt where he had been;
And never Tiber, rippling through the meads,
Made music half so sweet among its reeds;
And never had the earth such rich perfume
As when from him it chased the odour of the tomb!"

Another narrative of terror was related, on good authority, to an English writer on the subject of the catacombs. It was the story of a young French officer, in 1798, when the French republican army occupied the city.

Under the influence of a reckless defiance of the sacred memories of the place, and of a mad carouse with his companions over their wine in one of the apartments supposed to have been often used for the celebration of the eucharist, he rushed from them into the inner cavern, and was lost in its darkness. For a time his courage was sustained by the system of atheism and materialism common at that time to almost all his nation. But, as the night was prolonged, that courage gave way to the most fearful imaginations.

"The following morning the young officer was found by the guides in a state of stupor and unconsciousness. He was carried into Rome, and consigned to his friends and to the military hospital. The young man suffered a brain fever of the most violent and worst kind. He raved on his sick-bed, 'Take away those skulls! Remove those horrible bones! Shut up those graves, or deprive me of sight!' Every object converted itself in his eye to a skeleton or a spectre. Medicine and skilful treatment and assiduous care, slowly restored him to reason and to health; but from that

time forward he was an altered, serious, reverential man. He had interred his last scoff and impious jest in the Roman catacomb. He could no longer laugh at death, or that which is beyond this brief and troublous life. The awe which had penetrated him, and overthrown his reason, did not all depart with the restoration of his reasoning faculties. He burned the infidel works which had been his favourite volumes, and betook himself to the study of very different books. His comrades rallied him, but they could not change him Some seven years after, when killed in battle in Calabria, a copy of the Evangelists was found in his pocket."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CATACOMBS AS A PLACE OF WORSHIP.

The Christians would still worship their Lord and Master, although they were hidden away in "caverns and dens of the earth." Why should they not? True, they had exchanged a comfortable home in the sweet light and pure air for a very dismal one in the ground; but this change of place did not at all affect their own hearts, or the excellence of Him whom their hearts loved better than life itself.

Did not Daniel pray in the lions' den as he had done in his chamber? Did not Paul and Silas sing praises as heartily and acceptably while in the prison at Philippi as when they walked freely up to the splendid temple at Jerusalem?

The soul that truly loves and fears the Lord, will worship him cheerfully and regu-

larly everywhere. A true Christian may change his abode and his business, and all the circumstances about him may change, but he will always say, as pious David said, "O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."

It will be remembered that in the epitaph upon the tomb of the martyr Alexander, which we have copied in a previous connection, there is evidence that he was apprehended in some part of the catacombs, while upon his knees and about to worship the true God. It may be that he was then alone; but the probability is that others were then engaged with him in the religious services. Even by those who were not driven from their homes by persecutors, resort was made to these places for social worship. The various edicts of the emperors prove this. Valerian, in the third century, published an edict forbidding the Christians to assemble in the catacombs. His successor, Gallienus, revoked that edict, and restored to them the privilege.

A while afterward the cruel persecutor Maximian again took away from the Christians this liberty, by a new edict, and

finally, Constantine restored it permanently to them.

There were, at a very early period, places in the catacombs which were called chapels. At first they were of the simplest form possible—a mere enlargement of the vault or passage-way, both in width and in height. These were lighted, sometimes by apertures from the roof to the surface of the ground, and sometimes by lamps hung upon the walls around. The walls of the chapel on all sides were full of niches, or recesses, in which the remains of their friends were sleeping, while the living were there praising the Lord for whom some of those friends had died as martyrs.

It must have been impressive and affecting to the early Christians thus to worship their divine Master so near to the tombs of many of his faithful followers, who had gladly laid down their lives for his sake. How strong oftentimes are our emotions when we stand by the grave of some great and good man who died in the service of Christ! And how would our hearts burn within us in a church which was surrounded

on all sides by the graves and epitaphs of such Christians!

We can, however, but faintly conceive how the early Christians felt, who had fled from persecution, when, with perhaps a few who came secretly with food and sympathy, they assembled in the chapels of the catacombs to worship Christ. Probably purer worship or more acceptable prayer never ascended to heaven from the most magnificent cathedral, than went up from those dark and uncomfortable caverns. God looks at the heart of the worshipper, not at the place in which he worships.

After all persecution had ceased, and there was no longer a necessity for the Christians to resort thither for worship, they still continued to meet there at certain seasons. For instance, when the anniversary of some distinguished martyr's death occurred, his friends sometimes kept that anniversary by a religious service held near his tomb. This habit, and the state of feeling which it promoted, led to some changes in the catacombs. If a celebrated martyr had been buried in or near one of the chapels spoken of, then, as visiters on these occa

sions multiplied, and their wealth or zeal on this subject increased, they sometimes enlarged the chapel, and adorned it, perhaps, with more elegant and expensive tablets and monuments. Some of these chapels were made quite large, and highly ornamented; and were furnished with almost all the conveniences of a church above ground. In such places for many years Christians from Rome and its neighbourhood were accustomed to meet and hold their love-feasts and celebrate the Lord's supper.

The church in Smyrna, in the second century, after they had buried their martyred bishop, the venerable Polycarp, who had been a pupil of the apostle John, thus write:—"We buried the body of Polycarp in a suitable place, and there, when we are able, we shall meet with joy and exultation; and may the Lord grant us to celebrate the birth-day of his martyr, both in memory of those who have already fought, and for the exercise and preparation of those who have yet to fight!"

The graves of distinguished martyrs were often visited privately by individuals who

wished to revive their own piety by standing by the side of the ashes of the great and good. Thus Prudentius, of whom we have already spoken, in giving an account of his visit to the catacombs, and especially to the tomb of Hyppolytus, a martyr of the preceding century, says, "There have I prayed prostrate, sick with the corruptions of soul and body, and obtained relief."

We sum up our remarks on this point in the language of another.

"Every persecution contributed its stock of saints and martyrs to the subterranean tombs; and the catacombs, gradually enlarged by the Christians, assumed the character of a 'holy land,' inferior in sanctity only to Mount Calvary and the spot which had contained the tomb of Christ. When Constantine embraced the cross, struck down the gods of Greece and Rome, and changed the religion of the empire, these dark crypts were regarded as the centres of light and holy inspiration. They were frequented by the great and powerful, who took a pride, and believed that they gained a spiritual benefit, in decorating the tombs of the early martyrs and first confessors,

and in clearing out and cleansing those vast recesses of the dead."

Another writer upon the same subject says, "In the year 314, a Christian emperor gave to the church, as her right, those caverns which had so long been her refuge. Now commenced a new use of the catacombs. Where the Christians had formerly gone to preserve life, where they had laid the remains of their kindred, where their honoured martyrs lay awaiting the coming of their Lord, and where all the traditions of their past history had their most hallowed associations, they naturally betook them to meditate. Nor is there one of us who would not have loved to stand and muse in those dormitories of the faithful dead. We feel even as to the spot where we have buried one friend, the spot where we have looked down into an open grave till we felt as if our own hearts were at its bottom and growing cold, that we should love to go there again and meditate. And if so, how strongly would the Christians of Rome be drawn toward the tombs of their fathers in the faith, toward the scenes of saintly patience and glorious mar-

tyrdom! * * * Here they were wont not only to meditate individually, but also to meet, especially round the tombs of martyrs, to celebrate the love-feast or *agape*, and even to partake of the eucharist. This practice naturally, and perhaps inevitably, led to abuses and brought scandal on the faith."

"The representations of these solemn feasts were often repeated, in both sculptures and paintings, showing how general in that age was the custom. It was founded certainly on an unworldly idea, and one which Christianity alone could have originated. Look then at such an assembly, as, one by one, in silence and by stealth, they gather at their place of meeting. It is in the Eternal City, which is crimsoned with the blood of the earliest martyrs, and the name of Jesus of Nazareth is a forbidden sound within its walls. But scattered through its crowded thousands—even within sight of its Pantheon of gods—are the true-hearted, and joyfully they turn to their place of worship when the appointed time has come. Secretly they pass the gates, and steal across the Esquiline Hill, and descending into the

catacombs, thread their way through its narrow passages. The barriers of race and country—of rank and caste—are broken down, and for the first time in the world's history all are brethren. The swarthy Syrian is there—the slave indeed of an earthly master—yet here a freeman in Christ Jesus and a brother beloved for the faith's sake. Beside him is the intellectual Athenian, but he has learned a nobler philosophy than that of Greece, and found that the truest wisdom was to bow at the foot of the cross. And there, too, is the Jewish priest, shocked no longer by the presence of "they of the uncircumcision," but overcoming the narrow exclusiveness of his race, prepared to welcome the Jewish converts around him as inheritors of the same promises. It is an hour with them of holy joy, when the trials of the outward world are forgotten, its cares thrown aside, and their souls strengthened for that coming future in which they know not what shall await them. And when they part, they realize that before they meet again, some among them may win the crown of martyrdom."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CATACOMBS AS A CEMETERY FOR THE CHRISTIANS.

When Christianity was introduced into the Roman Empire, it was, as we have already said, the general custom of the Romans to burn the bodies of their dead. The few remains of bones and ashes were preserved in small urns, which were called "cinerary urns." They were usually deposited in small underground chambers constructed for the purpose, which were often in the garden or courts of dwelling-houses. From the resemblance which this singular apartment bore to a dove-cote, it received the name *columbarium*, from *columba*, a dove. Some of them were large enough to hold three hundred urns.

An American traveller thus describes one which he visited but a few years ago:— "There were few things in Rome more cu-

rious than one, seldom mentioned by travellers, called the Columbaria, or Dove-Cotes. These were places for interment, not for the bodies, but for the ashes of the dead. They were places dug in the ground, perhaps twenty or twenty-five feet square, and it may be sixteen or twenty feet deep. The sides are built up with shelves, and these shelves are partitioned off into small compartments, and each compartment contains a small marble or stone chest or urn. In the centre of the vault there is a square block, leaving a free passage between this and the outer walls, and this too is lined with shelves and compartments of the same description. These small chests or urns contain the ashes of the dead after their bodies had been burnt, as was formerly their custom. On one row of the shelves was inscribed

I put my hand into one of the urns, and took up a handful of the burnt bones, probably of some of the inmates of the palace."

Thus were the dead usually disposed of among the ancient pagan Romans. But the minds of the Christians revolted from this practice. Those of Jewish or Greek origin would regard it with hereditary dislike, and the native disciples would soon share all their feelings on this subject. They knew with how much care, in former times, the bodies of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Joseph and Lazarus had been buried—and their Saviour's body also—and thus would they bury their own beloved ones, and thus be themselves buried, when their own change should come.

From the inscription already quoted from the tomb of the martyr Alexander, we learn that he was put to death in one of these subterranean passages, whither he had fled for safety, or for worship. Nothing then was more natural than that he should be buried there. His murderers would not care to drag the corpse of a hated Christian above ground. The martyr's friends would hasten to perform the last offices of affection for it, by giving it a decent burial where it would rest undisturbed till the morning of the resurrection. No place would be so convenient

or so safe as one of these subterranean chambers. And of those who were put to death elsewhere, many were undoubtedly brought down to rest in the same secure place.

In the midst of the most cruel persecutions, the Romans were generally willing that the friends of the martyrs should dispose of their bodies as they pleased.

As in the case of the first martyr Stephen, his murderers allowed devout men to carry his body to the burial, so pagan cruelty was oftentimes satisfied with taking the lives of prominent Christians, and then giving up their mangled corpses to those humbler believers whom they did not care to kill.

At the same time there is no probability that funeral ceremonies would have been allowed in any suitable place above ground. For those rites, the place of interment must have been secluded and obscure. All this favours the truth of the tradition that very many of the bodies of the Christian martyrs were taken to the catacombs for burial.

What was at first done from necessity, would afterward be done from choice; and they would prefer to bury their friends here,

where so many who had already laid down their lives for Christ were buried.

When one who had been an eminent Christian, and whose name and praise were in all the churches, suffered martyrdom, the Christians were especially anxious to get possession of his remains, and to give them an honourable burial. Their zeal on this subject had probably some connection with the common heathen notion that the want of the rites of sepulture affected unfavourably the condition of the spirit. It certainly was carried to an unwise excess. The Roman Christians sometimes even incurred great risk of life, in order to obtain the body or fragments of the body of some revered and beloved officer of the church. Hence it was that Ignatius, when about to be thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre, prayed that the beasts "would make a grave for him, and leave nothing of his body," so that his Christian friends should have no trouble or danger to encounter in regard to his burial.

The number of Christians buried in the catacombs must have been very great, if, as these reasons induce us to believe, for more

than three hundred years, the Christian population of Rome were generally buried here. During some portion of this period, as for instance, the reign of the persecutor Decius, it was estimated that forty thousand of the population were Christians.

A Christian traveller, who visited the city in the latter part of the fourth century, exclaims, "It is scarcely known how full Rome is of buried saints—how richly the metropolitan soil abounds in holy sepulchres!"

The space thus occupied can be measured only by miles, or by thousands of acres, in extent. Different portions of the catacombs sooner or later had different names assigned them; and these names were generally taken from some Christian whom history or legend recorded as buried in that portion. Thus we have, even to this day, the Cemetery of St. Sebastian—of St. Agnes—of St. Priscilla—of Balbina, &c. &c.; though some of these saints may be apocryphal, and if they ever lived and died, it is by no means certain that they were buried in the particular fields that bear their names.

Let us here quote one inscription, taken

from the Cemetery of Balbina, as it will illustrate several points of interest. We give it first in Latin, though in plainer letters than the original, and then in English.

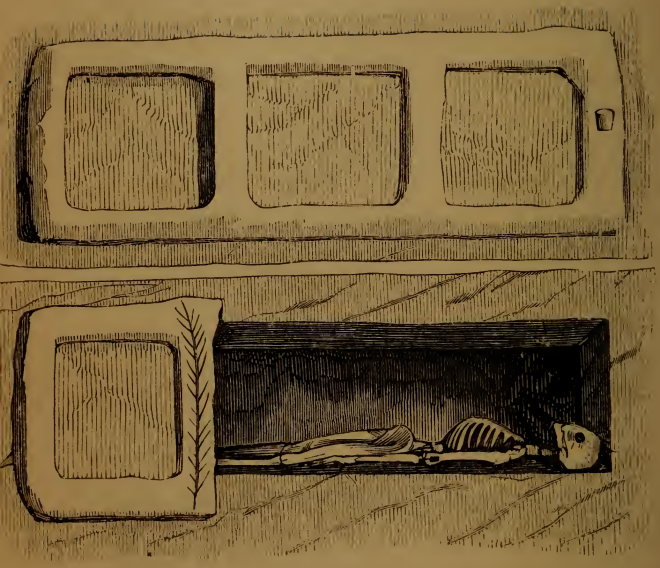
SABINI BISOMUM: SE VIVO FECIT SIBI IN CEMETERIO BALBINÆ, IN CRYPTA NOVA.

"The bisomum of Sabinus. He made it for himself during his lifetime, in the Cemetery of Balbina, in the new crypt."

The word *bisomum* means a place for two bodies. Usually one person only was buried in a cell or niche made in the sides of the chamber or passage-way. Occasionally the grave was made in the bottom of the passage.

A larger excavation was made when two were buried together; and a larger still for three, in which case it was called a *Trisomum*.

The principal passage-ways or subterranean chambers along whose sides these graves are found, were usually eight or ten feet high and six or seven feet wide. Occasionally they underlie each other, like the stories of a building, and in some instances were three stories deep and connected by stair-ways. The niches in their sides, which were used as graves, were sometimes scattered along



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quite irregularly, and sometimes were carefully arranged in tiers or courses one above the other, as in the accompanying picture.

"In the subjoined engraving, copied originally by Boldetti, we have a view of two graves, the first of which is closed by three pieces of terra-cotta, or burnt earth, while the latter is partially opened, so that the skeleton lying within can be seen. The palm-branch and cup have been rudely scratched upon the stone. It was thus, on these slabs, were cut the Christian emblems which the early followers of our Lord so much delighted to use, and there too they scrawled the brief epitaphs by which, in that age of fear and persecution, they marked the resting-place of the brethren. While every thing around speaks of suffering, it tells also of the simple, earnest faith of men, with whom the glories of the next world had swallowed up all the pains of their brief mortal prilgrimage."

After the body was deposited in its place, the entrance to the grave was closed up, and a brief inscription sculptured or painted on the tablet: so that we could walk along this passage with torch in hand, and have a brief

history of the sleepers there, as we pass through a cemetery above ground at the present day, reading on each side a few facts in regard to the buried dead.

Crypt means something concealed; in this connection it denotes a concealed passage or chamber. This name was therefore applied to the new passages that were opened for the sole purpose of burial, and were called new, in distinction from the original excavations made probably in procuring building materials. The new crypts were generally more convenient and elegant than the others. In one case, an inscription speaks of "the new crypt *behind the saints.*"

We know from various sources that the early Christians considered it a great privilege to be buried near any distinguished followers of Christ, and especially, near any one who had died a martyr. We conclude therefore that this new crypt was opened from a main passage, along whose sides distinguished Christians had been deposited, and opened in such a way as to lead around into the rear of the graves of eminent disciples which were upon the sides of the main passage. Thus

were they buried "in the new crypt behind the saints."

Jerome, who was a native of Dalmatia upon the eastern side of the gulf of Venice, but went to Rome to complete his education about the middle of the fourth century, was interested in visiting the catacombs, and from what he saw there and heard of the Christians, he was led after a short time to embrace their faith.

He has left us this vivid description of the catacombs at that period:—

"When I was at Rome, still a youth, and employed in literary pursuits, I was accustomed, in company with others of my own age, and actuated by the same feelings, to visit on Sundays the sepulchres of the apostles and martyrs; and often to go down into the crypts dug in the heart of the earth, where the walls on either side are lined with the dead; and so intense is the darkness that we almost realize the words of the prophet, "they go down alive into hell," (or *hades;*) and here and there a scanty aperture, ill deserving the name of window, admits scarcely light enough to mitigate the gloom which reigns below and as we advance

through the shades with cautious steps, we are forcibly reminded of the words of Virgil —"Horror on all sides; even the silence terrifies the mind."

If now the reader will open this book at the frontispiece, he may see an illustration of what we have been saying. Here the spectator is supposed to stand in one of the original or main passages of the catacombs, looking toward its entrance, where the light is streaming in from the outside. On the left and nearest side are three niches in the rock, made for graves, and either not yet occupied or their doors removed. The lower of these three is much larger than the others. This is a *bisomum*.

Farther along and upon the opposite side there is a partially closed opening which branches off from the main passage. This may have been a *new crypt*.

While the dead were generally buried separately, or two and sometimes three together, there is occasionally found a tablet which records a large number: thus—

MARCELLA AND FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY MARTYRS OF CHRIST.

As we have said before, this may mean that a few remains of many martyrs who perished at the same time, were gathered up and deposited in a common receptacle, and then the fact briefly recorded as above. Or, it may mean, that this tablet was placed there in memory of those who perished at a certain time, although none of their bodies may have been actually deposited there. The former supposition would find a parallel in these inscriptions in the Paris catacombs, before mentioned:—

TOMB OF THE REVOLUTION.

Or,

TOMB OF THE VICTIMS.

And the latter supposition would find its parallel in the monuments which are raised at this day, and inscribed thus:—

IN MEMORY OF
FIVE HUNDRED CITIZENS WHO FELL HERE WHILE FIGHTING FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

Or thus:—

ON THIS SPOT,
FIFTEEN WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE MASSACRED BY THE MERCILESS SAVAGES.

In the epitaph to which we have referred,

there occurs another significant word, viz. *cemetery*. This, we have already said, means a sleeping-place. The early Christians were the first to apply it to a place where their dead were buried; for they were the first who fully believed in a resurrection. As therefore they saw their friends lie down to sleep at night, in sweet assurance that they would arise again with the dawn, refreshed in both mind and body, so did they commit the bodies of their deceased friends to the tomb in as full and as sweet an assurance that ere long they would awake again and rise in new power and beauty, and also immortal.

What the rising sun was daily to a slumbering hemisphere, all that and even more would the coming of the glorious Sun of Righteousness be to all his followers who had died upon the earth. How natural then that they should speak of death only as a soft, sweet sleep! And who can wonder that they should have covered their tombs as they did with these delightful intimations that their friends had only laid themselves down to rest awhile, and would in due time awake and rise to a happier and better life?

How superior this to the poor consolations which the pagan Romans found in the thought of death! The doctrine of their life often was—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" Let us enjoy all we can while we live, for death will soon put an end to all our joys!

Some of their very epitaphs are characterized by like expressions of gross sensualism. Well may the tablet on which the following is engraved stand on the *opposite* side of the Lapidarian Gallery from that which is adorned by the sentiments of the Christians.

HE LIVED FIFTY SEVEN YEARS.
TO THE DIVINE MANES OF TITUS CLAUDIUS SECUNDUS.
HERE, HE HAS WITH HIM EVERY THING.
BATHS, WINE, AND LUST, RUIN OUR CONSTITUTIONS,
BUT THEY CONSTITUTE LIFE.
FAREWELL—FAREWELL!

The better class of pagan epitaphs breathe the language of despair. In the following plaintive inscription, we have an affecting illustration of what the apostle Paul had in mind when he told his fellow-Christians at Thessalonica that *they* should not "sorrow as others who have no hope."

A disconsolate mother thus bemoans her lost child:—

CAIUS JULIUS MAXIMUS, Æ. TWO YEARS AND FIVE MONTHS.
O RELENTLESS FORTUNE, WHO DELIGHTED IN CRUEL DEATH!
WHY IS MAXIMUS SO EARLY SNATCHED FROM ME—HE WHO LATELY USED TO LIE BELOVED, ON MY BOSOM!
THIS STONE NOW MARKS HIS TOMB. BEHOLD HIS MOTHER!

Here is another similar strain of lamentation over a son:—

HIS MOTHER FUSCA,
LEFT TO SORROW AND GROANING,
BURIED HIM, MOIST WITH TEARS AND BALSAM,
IN THIS SEPULCHRE.

The following is less plaintive, but more impious:—

I, PROCOPE,
LIFT UP MY HANDS AGAINST THE GODS WHO SNATCHED AWAY ME, INNOCENT.

It might be difficult to say whether the following were more trifling than stoical. The imagery is evidently borrowed from the theatre.

WHILE I LIVED, I LIVED WELL.
MY DRAMA IS NOW ENDED: SOON YOURS WILL BE.
FAREWELL, AND APPLAUD ME!

In almost the same words, the dying Augustus asked his friends if they thought he had played the drama of life well, and called upon them, if they so thought, to applaud him as he left the stage. In contrast with this fatalism, stoicism and despair, how cheering is the idea of the Christian's repose in death! Passing therefore from these pagan epitaphs to those which are Christian, is like emerging from the darkness of the catacombs into the sweet, bright light of day. A common Roman name for a grave was "the eternal home" or dwelling of the dead, a name which could be retained no longer when the gospel had brought life and immortality to light. Upon the dawning of the Christian hope on that heathen empire, and with faith burning brightly in their bosoms, they could no longer look upon the grave with despair, or apply to it names of gloomy association. Not satisfied with the Latin word *sepulchrum*, which meant only a place for burial, they employed most generally for the purpose one of the sweetest

and most pleasant words which language afforded; and from that time till now, the place where Christ's beloved followers are buried is called a *cemetery*, or "place of sleep."

Thus a Spanish traveller, who visited the catacombs awhile after persecution had ceased, communes with himself in regard to this matter, while standing in the presence of these numerous dead:—"There will soon come an age when genial warmth shall revisit these bones, and the soul will resume its former tabernacle, animated with living blood. * * *

"For this reason is such care bestowed upon the sepulchre—such honour paid to the motionless limbs—such luxury displayed in funerals. We spread the linen cloth of spotless white—myrrh and frankincense embalm the body. What mean these excavated rocks? What these fair monuments? What but that the object intrusted to them is sleeping and not dead!"

CHAPTER IX.

QUOTATIONS FROM THE CATACOMBS.

Of the symbols employed by the early Christians, as expressive of the object of their faith and the ground of their hope of eternal life and glory, the figure of the cross, as a memorial of the death of Christ, would seem the most natural and expressive, and the least likely to be perverted to the injury of those for whom Christ died. But this simple emblem of our redemption has grown into the crucifix, sometimes even nodding and winking to its worshippers by the concealed strings of the priests, and has been made for ages the instrument of superstition and idolatry. We have in the history of this corruption the saddest illustration of the aversion of man's heart to spiritual worship, and its desperate propensity to set up, in place of the Almighty, any idol of its own contrivance that can be

seen or handled. Let us then watch vigilantly against all attempts to introduce any material symbol into Christian worship, other than those expressly appointed by the Great Master of assemblies—taking warning from the present loathsome state of the church founded by the early martyrs, which has suffered the *cross* to obscure the *Christ*, and, where the first Christians rejoiced at the overthrow of idols, the beautiful sculptures of ancient art, has enshrined fragments of wood for worship. The pretended miracle wrought in the reign of Constantine for "the invention of the Holy Cross," shows how rapidly the church fell from its primitive sincerity; and as this (with the change of veneration for the martyrs into a superstitious reverence for their bones) took place before the catacombs were finally disused for interment, some of the later inscriptions bear the tokens of a declension afterward more deep and almost universal. There is no doubt that additions of this kind have been in some cases made upon the old tablets, since the re-opening of the catacombs.

A very common method of representing the Christian faith of the departed was by

the use on the grave-stone of the first two letters of the name Christ. If on the Greek capital letter X, the letter R, which is our P, is placed, we have the first letters of Christ's name in Greek, corresponding to CHR. This is commonly called the monogram. It is found upon very many of the Christian tombs. The pagans may not have understood its meaning, but it carried a world of meaning to the Christian's heart. When placed upon a tombstone, it means—*In Christ.* Thus, in the following inscription:

which probably signified,

Victrix, (a woman's name,) victorious in Christ.

Sometimes one limb of the X was extended, so as to resemble the cross, and still it would read as before, CHR, *i. e.* in Christ. As, upon this tablet and under a Latin word signifying innocence.

Occasionally, too, the Greek letters, Alpha and Omega, (the first and last in the Greek alphabet,) were added, making this symbol of the Saviour still more expressive; according to what the Redeemer says in the Apocalypse—"I am Alpha and Omega," &c.

Often the epitaph commenced or ended with these words—"In peace,"—or these, "Peace! Peace! Peace!" This idea of the sleeper's peace was often symbolized by the olive leaf or branch, and often by a dove.

Sometimes several of these symbols are found upon the same tablet, thus:

A palm leaf or branch is used in Scripture as a symbol of victory, Rev. vii. 9, and so is a wreath of laurel, "the corruptible crown"

spoken of by Paul, 1 Cor. ix. 25. These are frequently found separate, and sometimes we find them both encircling the monogram. Thus on the tombstone of a little girl

FLAVIA JOVINA, WHO LIVED THREE YEARS AND THIRTY DAYS—A NEOPHYTE—IN PEACE. (SHE DIED) THE ELEVENTH BEFORE THE KALENDS....

The reader will remember the literal meaning of the word *cemetery*. This idea of the Christian's death as a sweet, transient sleep, is often expressed in epitaphs.

THE SLEEPING-PLACE OF ELPIS.
ZOTICUS, LAID HERE TO SLEEP.
GEMELLA SLEEPS IN PEACE.
ASELUS SLEEPS IN CHRIST.

How comforting such inscriptions must have been to sorrowing friends!

VICTORIOUS IN PEACE AND IN CHRIST.

The emblem is an ancient bushel measure filled with corn.

MARTYRIA—IN PEACE.

VIDALIO, IN THE PEACE OF CHRIST.

NICEPHORUS, A SWEET SOUL, IN THE PLACE OF REFRESHMENT.

Sometimes the surviving friend pronounced a kind of benediction upon the happy dead:

IN CHRIST: BOLOSA, MAY GOD REFRESH THEE.

AMERIMNUS TO RUFINA, HIS DEAREST WIFE, THE WELL-DESERVING.

MAY GOD REFRESH THY SPIRIT.

This is very different from praying for the souls of the dead, which are suffering the torments of purgatory. None of the agonising entreaties for the prayers of the living, which filled the tombstones of the middle ages, appear in these ancient inscriptions. The mere forms of a benediction, like those we have quoted, are very rare. Their use in any case is undoubtedly to be attributed to their frequency upon pagan tombs; for all who have studied at all our common phraseologies, know how many expressions become habitual, whose literal interpretation would surprise those who utter them. If interpreted as prayers, these inscriptions would be as un-

scriptural as the following, taken from the tombs of cotemporary *Pagan* Romans.

HERE ARE THE REMAINS OF PELOPS.
MAY THE EARTH BE LIGHT UPON THEE.

FAREWELL THAIS:
MAY THE GODS BE GOOD TO THEE.

FAREWELL SEPTIMIA:
MAY THE EARTH BE LIGHT UPON THEE.
WHOEVER PLACES A BURNING LAMP BEFORE THIS TOMB, MAY A GOLDEN SOIL COVER HIS ASHES.

We remark, in passing, that this pagan custom of placing a lamp upon the tomb or near the dead, was universally reprobated by the Christians of the first three centuries; and it was only after the church had begun to depart from its primitive purity and simplicity, that it was adopted by any. It is a pagan, and not a Christian custom.

The inscriptions are generally very brief. But sometimes there is an allusion to some single trait in the character of the deceased; as in the following instances.

MAXIMINUS, WHO LIVED TWENTY-THREE YEARS:
FRIEND OF ALL MEN.

IN CHRIST.
ON THE FIFTH KALENDS OF NOVEMBER SLEPT
GORGONIUS,
FRIEND OF ALL, AND ENEMY OF NONE.

Sometimes the inscriptions give us pleasing information as to the relations of the departed.

CECILIUS THE HUSBAND, TO CECILIA PLACIDINA,
MY WIFE, OF EXCELLENT MEMORY,
WITH WHOM I LIVED WELL TEN YEARS, WITHOUT ANY QUARREL.
IN JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, THE SAVIOUR.

SACRED TO CHRIST, THE SUPREME GOD.
VITALIS, BURIED ON SATURDAY, KALENDS OF AUGUST,
AGED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AND EIGHT MONTHS.
SHE LIVED WITH HER HUSBAND TEN YEARS AND THIRTY DAYS.
IN CHRIST, THE FIRST AND THE LAST.

TO DOMNINA,
MY SWEETEST AND MOST INNOCENT WIFE, WHO LIVED SIXTEEN YEARS AND FOUR MONTHS, AND WAS MARRIED TWO YEARS, FOUR MONTHS, AND NINE DAYS: WITH WHOM I WAS NOT ABLE TO LIVE, ON ACCOUNT OF MY TRAVELLING, MORE THAN SIX MONTHS: DURING WHICH TIME I SHEWED HER MY LOVE, AS I FELT IT. NONE ELSE SO LOVED EACH OTHER. BURIED ON THE FIFTEENTH BEFORE THE KALENDS OF JUNE.

TO CLAUDIUS
THE WELL-DESERVING AND AFFECTIONATE, WHO LOVED ME.
HE LIVED ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS.
IN CHRIST.

A Christian female was sometimes called a "handmaid of God," a phrase used by Tertullian in opposition to "handmaid of the devil." Thus in the following:

AURELIA AGAPETILLA, THE HANDMAID OF GOD
WHO SLEEPS IN PEACE.
SHE LIVED TWENTY-ONE YEARS, THREE MONTHS, AND FOUR DAYS.
HER FATHER ERECTED THIS.

IN CHRIST.
AESTONIA, A TRAVELLING VIRGIN,
WHO LIVED FORTY-ONE YEARS AND EIGHT DAYS.
SHE DEPARTED FROM THE BODY ON THE FOURTH BEFORE THE KALENDS OF MARCH.

The word *virgo peregrina* translated "travelling virgin," means only that she was unmarried and absent from her usual home, either at the time of her conversion to Christianity, or at the time of her death. The following is inimitable for its tenderness and beauty.

LAURENCE, TO HIS SWEETEST SON SEVERUS,
BORNE AWAY BY ANGELS ON THE SEVENTH IDES
OF JANUARY.

And these too, are hardly less so:

CONSTANTIA,
OF WONDERFUL BEAUTY AND AMIABILITY,
WHO LIVED EIGHTEEN YEARS, SIX MONTHS, AND
SIXTEEN DAYS.
CONSTANTIA, IN PEACE.

SIMPLICIUS, OF GOOD AND HAPPY MEMORY,
WHO LIVED TWENTY-THREE YEARS AND FORTY-
THREE DAYS.
IN PEACE.
HIS BROTHER MADE THIS MONUMENT.

TO ADSERTOR, OUR SON;
DEAR, SWEET, MOST INNOCENT AND INCOMPARABLE,
WHO LIVED SEVENTEEN YEARS, SIX MONTHS, AND
EIGHT DAYS.
HIS FATHER AND MOTHER SET UP THIS.

TO JANUARIUS, SWEET AND GOOD SON, HONOURED
AND BELOVED BY ALL:
WHO LIVED TWENTY-THREE YEARS, FIVE MONTHS,
AND TWENTY-TWO DAYS.

HIS PARENTS.
LAURINIA, SWEETER THAN HONEY,
SLEEPS IN PEACE.

TO THE HOLY SOUL INNOCENS,
WHO LIVED ABOUT THREE YEARS.

DOMITIANUS, A SIMPLE SOUL, (I. E. INNOCENT AND SINCERE,) SLEEPS IN PEACE.

IN CHRIST:
DIED ON THE KALENDS OF SEPTEMBER,
POMPEIANUS THE INNOCENT,
WHO LIVED SIX YEARS, NINE MONTHS, EIGHT DAYS AND FOUR HOURS.
HE SLEEPS IN PEACE.

This particularity as to his age shows how precious to the parent's heart is every little circumstance connected with a lost child.

TO THEIR DESERVING SON CALPURNIUS,
HIS PARENTS MADE THIS:
HE LIVED FIVE YEARS, EIGHT MONTHS, AND TEN DAYS, AND DEPARTED IN PEACE ON THE THIRTEENTH OF JUNE.

RESPECTUS,
WHO LIVED FIVE YEARS AND EIGHT MONTHS,
SLEEPS IN PEACE.

This last inscription is surrounded with a crown of laurels, and underneath it are a dove and olive leaves; as at this day, the graves of little children are frequently decorated with the representation of a dove, or a lamb, or a rose-bud. In some graves of children

there have been found a few such playthings as interest childhood.

The following has a palm-branch engraved upon one side.

MACUS, AN INNOCENT BOY.

YOU HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO BE AMONG THE INNOCENT ONES. HOW ENDURING IS SUCH A LIFE TO YOU! HOW GLADLY WILL YOUR MOTHER, THE CHURCH OF GOD, RECEIVE YOU, RETURNING TO THIS WORLD. LET US RESTRAIN OUR GROANS, AND CEASE FROM WEEPING.

A catechumen was one who was under instruction, with reference to his admission into the church. Thus, the following:

UCILIANUS, TO BACIUS VALERIUS, A CATECHUMEN, WHO LIVED NINE YEARS, EIGHT MONTHS, AND TWENTY-TWO DAYS.

The title neophyte, was given to one who had become a convert from paganism to Christianity. In the first inscription following, it would seem as if it must mean only a child of such a convert, as one only twenty-one months old cannot be supposed to have forsaken heathenism and chosen Christianity, for himself.

THE TILE OF CANDIDUS, THE NEOPHYTE,
WHO LIVED TWENTY-ONE MONTHS:
BURIED ON THE NONES OF SEPTEMBER.

TO THE NEOPHYTE ROMANUS,
THE WELL-DESERVING,
WHO LIVED EIGHT YEARS AND FIFTEEN DAYS;
HE RESTS IN PEACE.
F. GRATIAN AUGUSTUS, FOR THE SECOND TIME, AND
P. PROBUS, BEING CONSULS.

The mentioning of the consuls at that time, enables us to fix the date of his burial, viz., at A. D. 371. It was, with the Romans, the common method of fixing dates.

But the names of the consuls are affixed to pagan inscriptions more frequently than to those of the Christians. Their common form was like the following:

TO THE DIVINE MANES.
PUBLIUS LIBERIUS LIVED TWO YEARS, THREE
MONTHS, AND EIGHT DAYS.
ANICIUS FAUSTUS AND VIRIUS GALLUS BEING CON
SULS.
That is, A. D. 98.

Here is a fragment of an inscription containing only the date, and age of the deceased.

* * * THIRTY YEARS—
IN THE CONSULATE OF SYRRA AND SENECIO:
That is, A. D. 102.

SERVILIA, AGED THIRTEEN.
IN THE CONSULATE OF PISO AND BOLANUS.
This was A. D. 111.

These pagan inscriptions, dating back even to the first century and to a period when as yet there had been but a few brief persecutions of the Christians, show that the pagan Romans used the catacombs, occasionally at least, for burial before the Christians were compelled to make them their common cemetery. As it was the general custom of the wealthy to burn their dead, and the few of the higher classes who buried them deposited them in costly sepulchres, the inscriptions which we have copied must have been of the poor or plebeian orders for whom in these deserted underground quarries their friends could easily find places of deposit without expense. Some branches of these subterranean galleries were undoubtedly also used for the dead of the pagan Romans even after the Christians began to occupy others. We know also that multi-

tudes of bodies of slaves and outcasts were thrown in heaps by their masters or the rulers, wherever they found any excavation or large pit easily accessible. The use of the catacombs by the Christians for burial would not protect them from defilement of this kind by the insulting heathen.

In consequence of the occasional burial of some of the more respectable of the heathen poor, a tablet is sometimes found, having a heathen inscription upon one side and a Christian inscription upon the other. The stone had been first placed at the heathen's grave, with an appropriate epitaph; and many years afterward, (perhaps after the lapse of one, two, or three centuries,) some poor Christian family had turned that side to the wall, and written upon the other a Christian epitaph. Thus the same stone may bear upon one face the name of the wicked whose memory shall rot, and upon the other a record of the righteous whose name shall be had in everlasting remembrance.

One of the most important peculiarities of the Romish church is the system of celibacy which it has engrafted into its whole system; not only "forbidding to

marry" among their priesthood, but inculcating through all their communion sentiments averse to that, which the word of God pronounces honourable and which the great author of our being instituted in man's primeval state. God himself ordained marriage in man's state of innocence, and throughout all ages of the church has given his sanction to the endearing tie, by positive injunction, establishing a principle equally adverse to the polygamy of the heathen and the monasticism of the Romish church. The history of the primitive church, as presented in the records of the catacombs, now staring in the face of that very church in the most notable and sacred of all their public institutions, the Vatican itself, is most explicit and decisive on this subject. The tender expressions of affection, which record, in terms as brief as they are touching, the love of husbands and wives, and of children, are evidences of that spirit of love which the Gospel impressed upon the hearts of those who were won to the belief of its truths. Not only was this a common sentiment among the people, but it prevailed among the ministers of the Christian church down to the fourth century.

Among the epitaphs which show that the marriage relation existed in the ministry, contrary to the present requirements of the Romish church, is the following copied from a parchment manuscript:—

HUNC MIHI COMPOSUIT TUMULUM LAURENTIA CONJUX,
MORIBUS APTA MEIS, SEMPER VENERANDA, FIDELIS.
INVIDIA INFELIX TANDEM COMPRESSA QUIESCIT
OCTAGINTA LEO TRANSCENDIT EPISCOPUS ANNOS.

My wife Laurentia made me this tomb; she was ever suited to my disposition, venerable and faithful. At length disappointed envy lies crushed: the bishop Leo survived his 80th year.

The bishop was buried by his wife; but the epitaph was evidently composed, either by the bishop before her death, or by a third person.

Of presbyters very few epitaphs remain: Aringhi gives the following:—

LOCVS BASILI PRESB ET FELICITATIS EIVS
SIBI FECERVNT.

The place of Basil the presbyter, and his Felicitas. They made it for themselves.

Aringhi was accused by Reinesius of having suppressed the word *wife* in this

epitaph. Fabretti, in defence of the Roman antiquarian, observes, that there would be no advantage in suppressing the word, as Basil could style none other than his wife "his Felicitas."

The epitaph of a priest's daughter is also given by Aringhi (lib. iv. c. 29).

OLIM PRESBYTERI GABINI FILIA FELIX
HIC SVSANNA JACET IN PACE PATRI
SOCIATA.

Once the happy daughter of the presbyter Gabinus, here lies Susanna, joined with her father in peace.

Aringhi has preserved a remarkable inscription to the wife of a deacon:—

LEVITAE CONIUNX PETRONIA FORMA PVDORIS
HIS MEA DEPONENS SEDIBVS OSSA LOCO
PARCITE VOS LACRIMIS DVLCES CVM CONIVGE
NATAE
VIVENTEMQVE DEO CREDITE FLERE NEFAS
DP IN PACE III NON OCTOBRIS FESTO VC CONSS.

Petronia, a deacon's wife, the type of modesty.—In this place I lay my bones; spare your tears, dear husband and daughters, and believe that it is forbidden to weep for one who lives in God. Buried in peace, on the 3rd before the Nones of October, in the consulate of Festus (*i. e.* in 472.)

The epitaph of a lector, or reader, is given by Fabretti:—

CLAVDIVS ATTICIA
NVS LECTOR
ET CLAVDIA
FELICISSIMA
COIVX.

Claudius Atticianus a lector, and Claudia Felicissima, his wife.

The lectors were ordained very young, and promoted to other offices in course of time. They were a class somewhat resembling our choristers, and were employed to read the Scriptures aloud in the church. At that time, remarks Jerome, "none of the noble women in Rome knew anything about monasticism; nor did they venture, on account of the novelty of the thing, to assume a name then reckoned base and ignominious."* From the year 360 we may date the introduction of monasticism into Rome.

Whatever purity of intention belonged to the earliest votaries of monasticism, it is to be feared that the end proposed by the monks

* Epistle 96. Epitaphium Marcellæ.

and nuns of later times, was to purchase, by its means, the highest rewards that Heaven could bestow. To be saved by the blood of Christ was humbling, when salvation could be bought by a species of self-sacrifice. A new passport to eternal glory, and one which conferred upon its possessor great earthly honour, was the premium upon a life of celibacy.

We may not find a better opportunity than this to refer to one remarkable omission in the funeral tablets of the catacombs. It is stated, that in all the vast collection in the Lapidarian gallery, (although some of the tablets are probably of a date much later than the fourth century) the name of the *Virgin Mary* does not once occur. Nor is it to be found in any truly ancient inscription published in the works elsewhere mentioned. This is only in accordance with the well known fact that she is scarcely mentioned in the writings of the fathers of those centuries. The astonishing contrast between the ancient Christian church and the modern Greek and Roman churches, in this respect, cannot be too forcibly impressed on us.

The Virgin Mary is in fact the enthroned

goddess of southern Europe. Her votaries would indignantly deny this; but nothing is more certain: for whatever name we may use for the one to whom we give the first place in our religious affections, that being is our God. Every name of dignity ascribed to the goddesses of the old paganism, every accumulation of epithets denoting power and glory in heaven and on earth, is found in the litanies of the modern papal church, as well as in the private devotions of the people. And the efficacy of her interposition is especially sought at the hour of death, and for the souls of the departed.

This Mary-worship, though very gradually introduced, became firmly established during the dark ages. To give place to his human mother, the Son of God was deposed from his throne as mediator. "May God Almighty forgive your sins for the merits of our Lady!" was the form of absolution used by Pope Gregory VII. A writer of authority in the Roman church, Martin Del Rio, a Jesuit priest, Doctor of Theology, and "Professor of the Sacred Scriptures" in her colleges, in his work published in 1599, with the sanction of church dignitaries, and afterward several

times reprinted, tells the following story, which is but one of a hundred of the same character, in the Catholic books of early times:

"After the battle of Nicopolis between the Emperor Sigismund and the Turks, a *bodyless head* among the slain began to talk, and called for a priest. 'I am a Christian,' it cried; 'I fell in this battle without absolution and confession. Mary mother does not permit me to sink into eternal punishment; she preserves to me the use of the tongue that I may confess my sins and purify my soul by the apostolic sacred rites for the dying. Call therefore I pray, a priest, who may hear my confession and absolve me." The reason assigned by him for this peculiar grace from Mary, was, that he had always rendered her a peculiar devotion and had kept every year her seven festivals with rigid exactness. After confession, absolution and extreme unction, the head became instantly silent. Del Rio refers for this narrative to Hungarian historians and adds: "Let the innovating reformers read it, and repent in view of a miracle so illustrious; confirming so positively the duty of devotion to the mother of

God, of fasts and festivals and the sacrament of confession.

The epitaphs of the Middle Ages often indicate the prevalent substitution of Mary for Christ. There was less of it in England than in Southern Europe. Yet such inscriptions as the following were common even there: it was in a church yard at Kaynham:—

FOR THE LOVE OF JESU, PRAY FOR ME;
I MAY NOT PRAY NOW; PRAY YE
THAT MY PEYNES LESSED MAY BE,
WYTH ONE PATER-NOSTER, AND ONE AVE.

That is, by repeating the Latin of the Lord's prayer, and of the salutation to the Virgin Mary:—the object of the last being to obtain her mighty interposition to deliver the soul from the flames of purgatory.

We have dwelt on this subject more at length because this *woman-worship* is apparently now reviving throughout all the Catholic world, and with very little modification of its old form of blasphemy. From their yet speaking epitaphs, the early Christians of Rome attest their own freedom from this corruption, and call on us like them to love and serve Him only, who is our only Saviour.

CHAPTER X.

PICTURES FROM THE CATACOMBS.

We have already seen what use was made of the pictures or sculptures of certain things as emblems of spiritual truths; as for instance, a dove, to represent meekness and innocence; a dove bearing an olive leaf, as an emblem of peace; and a laurel wreath or a palm-branch as a sign of victory.

We may add to these, the lamb, as a symbol of gentleness and innocence, and a cock, as a signal for watchfulness. In a picture which was made probably as late as the fourth century, we find two persons facing each other, and between them stands an Ionic column of about their own height, surmounted by a crowing cock. We at once perceive that this was an attempt to represent in picture the scene of Peter's denial.

The figure of a ship was frequently used upon the tomb to indicate that the soul of

the deceased had launched off upon a voyage toward the haven of eternal rest. We shall refer to this beautiful symbol again.

The anchor was also used as at this day, as the emblem of steadfast hope.

As the doctrine of the resurrection was new to them and at the same time a doctrine of unspeakable consolation to mourners, we find it very frequently symbolized upon their tombs. This is sometimes done and very appropriately done by a picture of Lazarus coming forth from his grave at the call of his Saviour. But these primitive Christians for some reason, seemed to have a great partiality for the representation of Jonah, restored to a life on shore, as a symbol of the Resurrection. Here is an engraving of one such copied from a sarcophagus, or coffin, said to have been found in the catacombs.

It would be difficult to imagine a specimen of art more rude than this, and yet it suggested to their minds the grand fact of God's ability to restore the lost to life again.

The ship is here a mere boat or skiff; the fish, a rude monster with the head and paws of a quadruped; the sea only a narrow stream with a bold shore; and on one side of the boat the monster is swallowing the disobedient prophet, while upon the other side, it is, at the same moment, casting him forth headlong against the rocks upon the shore! In another picture of this scene, the prophet issues from the monster's mouth face upward, and immediately over his head there hang suspended from the naked rock three ripe gourds.

In the picture above engraved, the artist, as if to economize room, and represent as many good things as possible in his picture,

dismisses all regard to chronological order, and places in the back ground Noah in his ark, holding out his hand to receive the dove.

The dove seems to be standing upon the elevated prow of the boat, while Noah is standing or sitting in a mere box. In other pictures of this subject, the ark or box has a lid and lock. The lid is thrown back, and the patriarch stands with outstretched arms for the arrival of the dove with the olive-leaf, indicating to him that he might now leave his narrow home. The application even of

these rude pictures to the hope of the sleeping Christian is very obvious. Other scriptural histories of the deliverance of God's people from scenes of peril were also used to suggest the same consoling doctrine of the resurrection. Hence we find representations of Daniel standing calm and unhurt

Daniel in the Den of Lions. p. 161.

between two fierce lions; and his three friends stand as calmly amid the fires of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. One of their

pictures of this class we copy as a curiosity. The mighty furnace of the plains of Dura is reduced to a mere oven in three compartments, over the flames of which the three stand; the fire being fed through three small doors beneath. But their calm countenances and the position of their hands, as if spread in prayer or praise, indicate very clearly the grand truth of the symbol, viz., that God is able to protect his people from the wrath of all their enemies, and to make them peaceful and happy amid the most fiery trials.

Here is also a picture of Abraham offering up his son Isaac. The hand over the patriarch's left shoulder is the very significant

and appropriate symbol by which the interposition of the Deity was represented. They dared not attempt to picture himself, as has been profanely done so often in the Papal Church, but only a symbol of his presence to arrest the sacrifice. The animal at Abraham's feet is undoubtedly the ram which God provided for the burnt offering. This picture rude as it is, is a much better specimen of the art of sculpture than most of those before

copied, and hence we refer it to a somewhat later period.

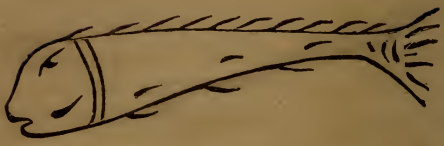
We have spoken of the monogram which, by a combination of two letters, represented Christ, and thus Christianity. There was also another enigmatical expression of essentially the same truth. One of the most common pictures accompanying inscriptions is that of a fish.

In the Greek language, (the original language of the New Testament) the word fish is ἰχθυς, which in English would be thus expressed in five letters. viz., I-CH-TH-U-S.

These five letters are the initials of five words dear to the Christians, viz.:

I	X	Θ	Υ	Σ
Jesus—	Christ—	of God—	the Son—	Saviour.

So that by this simple and common word Ichthus, or by the still simpler picture of a fish, they could suggest to themselves and to each other the sublime and precious truths expressed in these words. It was a comprehensive confession of faith, and hence was very frequently painted or sculptured upon the tombs of his followers.



Here is an exceedingly simple and rude picture of the fish; and here is one equally rude, but accompanied by the monogram.

This language of signs and symbols may have answered a double purpose to the primitive Christians. For if they were in danger on account of their faith, still, by the use of some of these significant words, or figures, they could make themselves known to one

another, or reveal the place where a believer slept without exciting the suspicion of their enemies. Many of them who could not read, (for reading was the privilege of the few in those centuries, whether of pagans or Christians,) could easily recognize the tomb of a friend, by means of some painting or sculpture upon it, while they could not distinguish it by the inscription.

It will excite the surprise of some readers that these sculptures and paintings should be so exceedingly rude, in an age and in a city in which all the fine arts were at the very zenith of perfection. We might answer by pointing to the antique grave stones in many of our country church-yards, where we may find specimens of versifying and of sculpture which will match the rudest specimen that can be dug out of the darkest crypt of the catacombs;—and these too made at the very time when the arts were elsewhere cultivated with great success.

But a proper and satisfactory explanation is found in the condition and state of feeling of the Christians of those centuries. They were as a class too poor to have commanded for their resting places, an expensive style of art,

even if they had desired to do it. A poor Fossor could afford no inducement for a Phidias to come down from the pleasant light of day and spend much time in adorning the tomb of a despised Christian. Neither would the many who belonged to the humbler classes, possess a taste sufficiently cultivated to place any very great value upon the higher works of art. But the principle explanation is, that the arts were at that time altogether pagan. The artists were heathen and doubtless sympathised with their fellow-heathen in their feelings toward Christianity and their greatest works were executed under the patronage of pagan priests or worshippers, for heathen Gods and heathen temples. They were also as polluted by the multitude of sculptures and paintings grossly obscene, as they were idolatrous. The fine arts had not, as yet, been applied to a single Christian use. There was, in short, nothing Christian about them, and the Christians could not have one pleasant religious association with them. On the contrary their whole religious nature abhorred them. To their minds they were idolatrous, and corrupting. Their hearts revolted from them no less than

their consciences. They would as soon think of employing a devotee of Juno or of Bacchus to bury their friends who had died for Christ, as to employ a pagan artist to adorn their tomb. Rather would they employ the rough hand and the rude implements of a poor unskilled Fossor to make the few emblems upon the tomb, with any tool which would serve the purpose provided only he did it with a true love to Christ and to Christ's true followers.

Thus in their piety—a piety formed in utter opposition to and in a thorough disgust of, the surrounding heathenism,—in this do we find the principal reasons for the very low state of art indicated by the few specimens furnished us in the catacombs.

But, rude as these representatives were, the symbol itself was almost always a beautiful and appropriate one, and the truth symbolized was the grandest or the most comforting truth which the Gospel reveals. And faulty as may have been the grammar, the spelling or the lettering of the inscriptions, they notwithstanding did generally contain the most elevating and beautiful *sentiments*.

Grant that their taste for art or their skill

in them was very rude, still it must be allowed that their *Christian tastes* were not uncultivated. Their hearts were pervaded with the graces of the spirit. No sweeter or purer Christian sentiments were ever recorded than we find here and there upon the dark walls of the catacombs; and though the present generation of Christ's followers may have the advantage of them in very many respects, there are no epitaphs written at this day more appropriate or beautiful, or sweetly Christian than hundreds which were indited by the fervent piety of these primitive believers.

The present generation would be gainers could they exchange some "modern improvements," of which there is much boasting, for some of those inward graces of character, the adornings of the heart, of these early Christians.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE CATACOMBS.

AFTER the Emperor Constantine had embraced Christianity, early in the fourth century, he formally gave the catacombs to the Christians as church property, on the ground that they had been already consecrated by their use as the burial-place of the martyrs. Although persecutions had ceased, and the Christians might bury their dead wherever they pleased and with whatever display of funeral rites and costly monuments, they still continued to bury them in the catacombs. During the centuries succeeding, many bishops of Rome were deposited here and frequently distinguished persons were brought from a great distance, that they might be laid in a place made

sacred by the presence of so many distinguished saints. This practice prevailed to a greater or less extent for two hundred years, during which period very much was also done to enlarge and adorn these subterranean cemeteries. During this same period, they were constantly visited by Christians, sometimes from curiosity, as by Jerome; more frequently for religious contemplation and devotion, as by Prudentius; occasionally for the celebration of the love-feasts and the eucharist. The anniversary of the death of any distinguished martyr, who was buried there, was often observed by sacred festivities before his tomb. At this time, the catacombs were the places most deeply interesting, and consequently the most frequented of all the vicinity of the city.

But the secular power and glory of the Romans had been long on the decline. The seeds of decay were abundantly sown during the corrupt and tyrannic reigns of emperors, whose names are by-words of infamy even to this day. Like their rulers, the masses of the people had become licentious and effeminate. It was the judgment of a righteous God, that doomed that empire to ruin,

which had "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever," and had wallowed in all the filthy lusts of reprobate hearts. Besides this, for two long centuries they had been shedding the blood of his faithful children, and doing their utmost to overthrow the glorious kingdom which Christ came upon earth to establish. Their doom was just. "I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

The instrumentality used to effect this end was peculiar. As Gideon of old, "with thorns and briers, taught the men of Succoth," so did Jehovah correct the haughty and corrupt Roman nation by means of barbarous tribes, which might be called the thorns and briers of the wilderness. Rude and warlike hordes, full of vigour and cruelty,—as the Huns, Goths, Lombards

and Vandals, one after another poured in upon Italy, from the north and the north-east, crushing whatever came in their way, rioting in the luxuries which were so rare to them and destroying the beautiful works of art for which they had no taste. What the rushing flood of a sudden freshet in summer is to the richly-clad vales over which it sweeps, such was this terrible invasion of barbarism to the wealthy and luxurious cities of the empire. The visits of the barbarians to the catacombs, were only to rifle them of whatever treasures were deposited there, or to search if any fugitives were there hidden from the sword. And after they had vanquished all opposition, as they did in the course of the fifth century, nothing would be done by them to preserve the knowledge of the places where a strange and conquered people of a strange religion were buried.

Thus these excavations which had been before thronged by pilgrims from all parts of the empire, under the iron rule of these northern barbarians, became more and more neglected. The number of visitors drawn there by curiosity or piety gradually dimin-

ished, and the number of inhabiting moles and bats increased, until they were almost the undisturbed tenants of these dark vaults. Robbers and bandits could there lurk in comparative safety; and there was the place for conspirators to meet and mature their plots in secresy. The walls and the dead tenants of the cells would not betray them. Sometimes, also, we hear of shepherds and their flocks turning into some convenient opening to the catacombs, in order to pass a night in safety, or to avoid a driving storm. In some parts the earth and rock about the entrances caved in and entirely obstructed them, while in other parts, shrubs and rank weeds grew up and concealed them.

When at length the conquerors submitted themselves to bear the Christian name and the priesthood had regained its authority, every old superstition returned with gross exaggeration; forms were substituted for faith, and legends for history. Several of the catacombs were then re-opened, but happily, those consecrated by the burials of the earlier believers, remained either covered or neglected. The chief interest of the Roman church of the dark ages was directed to

saints whose very existence is doubtful, or to those whose lives were a gloomy caricature of the gospel. A burial in the caverns, then regarded as most sacred, in the midst of altars and images and ever burning candles, was considered as making salvation sure. Many kings whose crimes had deserved the maledictions of their people, expected to rise to heaven by the efficacy of the intercession of the holy martyrs, if their bones could be laid thus near them. Several petty kings of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy were buried there; Cedwalla, Conrad, Offa, and Ina. Some of them expelled by their rivals or subjects; and some of them flying cowardly from their posts of duty, leaving nations to be ruled by children, while they counted their beads and muttered the vain repetitions of formal prayers, in the cells of the catacombs, or of equally gloomy monasteries.

They became however, again almost wholly disused both for worship and burial, during that period of Rome's greatest depression, from the eleventh to the latter part of the fourteenth centuries. During this dark period or the earlier barbarian ages,

many of the tombs were broken open, and the inscriptions and ornaments defaced by wilful violence. As some of the galleries have been found almost filled with sand, apparently carefully deposited, it has been supposed that some friendly hands might have done this to protect other graves from similar violation. There are a few memorials of occasional visitants even of that age, who left pleasant evidences of their presence there. In one place, a few words show that the Bishop of Pisa was there with companions, early in the fourteenth century. In another place are six names with the sign of the cross after each, and under all the date—A. D. 1397.

In another place, is this still more interesting record, with the date 1321 above it, and the names of three visitors beneath:

GATHER TOGETHER, OH CHRISTIANS, IN THESE CAVERNS, TO READ THE HOLY BOOKS, TO SING HYMNS TO THE HONOUR OF MARTYRS AND THE SAINTS THAT LIE HERE BURIED, HAVING DIED HERE IN THE LORD; TO SING PSALMS FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOW DYING IN THE FAITH! THERE IS LIGHT IN THIS DARKNESS. THERE IS MUSIC IN THESE TOMBS.

During the century or more succeeding, there were chapels erected in the vicinity of some of the entrances, and much use made of the bones for purposes of superstition; but the inner caverns even of those whose entrances were open, seem to have been unvisited. At length, in the sixteenth century, an unusual interest began to be felt in the antiquities of the church. Questions also in regard to relics were warmly discussed at Rome and elsewhere. This directed the attention of a few to the catacombs; and, perhaps, for the first time since their construction, they were entered by persons seeking to ascertain only facts, and willing to toil in a thorough exploration. The examination opened to the explorers more than was expected, and many things quite different from what was anticipated. These antiquarians, lovers of the old and the forgotten, took up the subject for their own gratification. Some of them spent many years in this underground search, gathering relics, copying inscriptions and paintings, and writing accounts of what they had seen and done. Some passed thus the greater part of their lives, leaving the volumes pre-

pared by them, to be published by survivors. "Father Bosio," as he was called, (who was the first professional *miner* among these buried antiquities,) spent more than thirty years in this work, the principal part of which was done underground, in a close and unpleasant atmosphere, and by torch or lamp light. Indeed, he lived so long underground that the light of day was at last painful to his eyes. When, after his death, his works were published, they bore this significant title—*Subterranean Rome.*

He was followed by another indefatigable antiquary and enthusiast, Boldetti, who also spent thirty years in this work. Others of less distinction have continued investigations in that interesting field, until the present time. A French archæologist, M. d'Agincourt, toward the close of the last century went to Rome to study this subject for six months, and he staid *fifty years*, wholly occupied all this time in collecting and arranging the materials of a book upon this subject. And to show that this mine is not yet exhausted, we add that two other Frenchmen, Messrs. Perret and Petit, are about to publish the results of their long study and search

upon these old fields, which are said to be as rich and interesting as any of the preceding.

Of the treasures which the bosom of the earth has yielded up in later times, for the instruction and pleasure of its inhabitants, the Christian will regard these as peculiarly interesting. And we have much reason for thankfulness to God, that these evidences of the faith and comparative purity of the early church, were thus locked up in these great vaults until the favourable time when they were opened. Had the entrances remained unobstructed through all the periods of barbarism, the monuments would all have been ruthlessly destroyed, as many of them were. Had they attracted more attention during some of the ages of gross superstition, they would have been brought up to light, but would soon have been scattered and lost, their plainest testimony misunderstood, and even perverted to the support of systems of falsehood. They remained securely during these centuries, as in a grand museum, with its doors of entrance closed. When at last, those doors were opened, and the light of the sixteenth century was let in

upon them, most of them were found entire, and as distinct, as they were when those of whom they were the memorials, dropped into their long sleep.

A wise providence appointed the time when they were opened. Many ages ago, the bounteous Creator moulded the rich veins of minerals and metals, and then laid them aside between the folds of the everlasting rock, to lie there in silence and safety; and men are now uncovering one after another of these full storehouses, as they have need of them. So did He store away in the bosom of the earth, beside the precious dust of his saints, these interesting records of the early Christians; and when at last, the time was ripe, and the minds of men were awake, and they began to discuss the nature, and usages of the Christian church, when many were claiming that from the very first, it had held their erroneous doctrines and their semi-pagan ceremonies; at this epoch, when the purity and honour of the church were in question, then did God open these hidden treasures of truth. Suddenly, as if almost by miracle, there sprung from the dark bosom of the earth, a

testimony in regard to the simplicity, purity, and piety of the primitive church, which has no parallel except in the books of the New Testament. Even the infidel stands abashed and silent before these beautiful and incontrovertible evidences of Christianity. He is forced to acknowledge these, because the course of argument which would discredit them, would require him to give up at once all that he believes concerning the characters and events in the secular history of Rome during the same period.

Caligula, fourth Emperor of Rome.

CHAPTER XII.

PERVERSIONS OF THESE DISCOVERIES.

In the book of Job we are told, that on the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them. The history of the church too often illustrates this almost constant presence of evil with good. No better proof can be found of this, than the gross and wicked *misuse* which many who professed to be Christians, made of these interesting discoveries. Instead of copying in their own hearts, and in their religious services, the purity and simplicity of the primitive Christians, which every relic of these ancient times indicated, they used (or rather abused) these relics in such a way as to make the ignorant still more blind and superstitious, and thus to render the whole church of Christ, as far as they were able to do it, still more unlike the primitive and holy model.

We have already mentioned the superstitious use made of the remains found in those small portions of the catacombs which were visited by the monks of the Middle Ages. But as soon as their contents became known by the later researches of which we have spoken, a course of outrage and fraud commenced, which we set forth in the graphic language of another.

"It was not till the sixteenth century," excepting as before stated, "that the evidence of their existence and their uses called attention to them, and the interest and importance of the subject were forced upon the lazy and slumbering inmates of the innumerable convents of Rome. And even then they were destined to be desecrated by a use that could scarcely have been anticipated. They were invaded by innumerable bands of monks and friars, collecting from their graves the bones of the long-buried dead, disturbing the mouldering relics of mortality, dragging them into the upper world, hawking them from city to city and from country to country, and driving an execrable traffic in them under the name of relics. Every grave was rifled, every skeleton was

rent asunder, every bone was pounded in order to multiply splinters; and when once the grave of some martyr or saint was said to be discovered, the head was severed and sent to one country, and the leg was severed and sent to another; an arm was forwarded to one land and a thigh to another; a tooth was extracted from the skull and sent to some convent, and a rib, severed from the back, sent to some monastery. And, at the same time, a traffic of the most disgraceful and degrading nature was carried on in all these, as lawful articles of ecclesiastical merchandise! The demand for such articles was so great in the superstition and ignorance of the times, and the miraculous properties of such relics were so extravagantly extolled, as of incalculable advantage to the temporal and spiritual interest of the possessors, that the demand of the market soon called forth an adequate supply; and such was the unscrupulousness of the authorities at Rome, and so utterly profligate the monks who were the merchants in this matter, that they not unfrequently sold several different skulls as the only true skull of some particular martyr, and several different arms as the

veritable arms of some favourite saint, so that even at the present day, some saints have several different heads and arms in different places. Now and then the traveller in Italy discovers some martyr who has had two or three heads, and some saint who has had four or five arms, and perhaps a still greater superfluity of legs. The enormous amount of wealth which this traffic brought to Rome is almost incredible. The catacombs, as a mine of bones, proved incomparably more precious than if they had been a mine of silver."

The following is narrated as an instance of the deception which has been practised upon the ignorant, through the avarice or the ignorance of the Papal clergy. They happened to find a grave in the catacombs bearing this inscription,

JULIA EVODIA ERECTED THIS TO HER FAITHFUL MOTHER.

It was accompanied with certain letters which showed it at once to be a pagan epitaph. But the priests were either too ignorant to understand the meaning of these letters, or they were at that time in particular need of a new saint in their calendar, and a new

stock of relics in their market; and so they at once christened the heathen sleeper as St. Evodia, and sold her bones and all that pertained to her grave, as relics of a saint and martyr! In their ignorance they committed another blunder. It was not the person buried, but her daughter that placed the stone there, whose name was Evodia; so that they made a heathen into a saint, and put the living in place of the dead, and gave the daughter's name to her mother!

It mattered little, however, since the relics sold well, and fanned the superstition of the purchaser, while they filled the coffers of the seller.

But this evil became so outrageous, that all sensible minds at length revolted against it. Many, even of the monks, had too much conscience to assist in it; and some openly protested against it. When at length Luther arose, this abominable traffic in spurious relics of imaginary martyrs was one of the many foul spots in the Papal church which he uncovered to public view, the exposure of which was very effectual in turning the hearts of thousands from that corrupt system, and preparing them to desire, and then to

take part in a "reformation." But in defiance of the contempt of all intelligent observers, and of the fearful denunciations of God against such sacrilegious frauds, this ridiculous and impious farce is re-enacted occasionally at the present day, and in all its original absurdity. Take as a specimen the following more full account of a transaction, to which we have before referred, which occurred but a few months ago, and notices of which may be found in a recent journal, religious and secular.

Amiens is a city in the north of France, a few leagues from Paris. The Roman bishop of Amiens, named Salinis, was desirous, it seems, of reviving the piety and the enthusiasm of the faithful in his diocese, and therefore he went to Rome to procure some sacred relic which he might bring back for the benefit of the faithful in his flock.

The pope was pleased with his zeal, and immediately ordered search to be made in the catacombs, peradventure something might be discovered which would answer the purpose of the pious bishop. In due time, the pope's agents announced their having discovered a cell closed by a flat

stone, with an inscription which they translated thus:

THEODOSIA,
BORN AT AMIENS.
ERECTED BY HER HUSBAND, AURELIUS OPTATUS.

They also certified from tokens interpreted by themselves, that she was a martyr, and therefore her relics were of a superior order.

Surely it was very fortunate, that without the trouble of costly explorations in before unopened catacombs, but in parts easy of access, and upon a short search, there should be found for the bishop of Amiens a martyr's grave untouched, and that martyr one that had been born in his own city! And quite as fortunate it was, that the bones of this saint should have been found essentially entire, after a burial of fifteen hundred years! This miraculous preservation of the bodies is however, one of the signs of saintship; almost equal to the sweet odour of their bones, so often certified by these priestly plunderers of tombs and charnel houses.

It should be remarked in passing, that the Latin inscription upon the tablet produced by the Roman priests, does not in fact state that the dead was born at Amiens. The

words so translated apply grammatically only to the husband, and mean only that he was of the nation or tribe called "Ambian," from which tribe the city of Amiens was perhaps named. Nor does the epitaph contain evidence that she was even a Christian. But leaving these questions (although they are important for the investigation and settlement of all bone worshippers,) the result was, that the bones were carefully placed in a box made for the purpose, which box was then bound with a red silken cord and carefully sealed; then two delegates were sent from France, one an ecclesiastic and the other of noble rank, to transport the precious freight to Amiens; and in due time their august commission was fulfilled without any accident or delay!

The day on which this box entered Amiens, the pious bishop declared to be the finest and the most glorious day of his life! In the presence of a solemn assembly convened for the purpose, this august box was opened and the sacred relics were found to be in perfect order. Of course there was great rejoicing among the faithful. Discourses were pronounced by priests, of

which the following may be taken as a fair specimen.

"Blessed be God, the author of every perfect gift, who fulfils our ardent wishes, and brings back among us, after an interval of fifteen centuries, the body of St. Theodosia crowned with the glory of saints and the palm of martyrs. Theodosia, restored to our veneration, shall shed upon the episcopal city and the whole country her favours, shall remove from us calamities and fears, shall preserve us in faith," &c., &c.

Some of the citizens of Amiens, perhaps, had rashly expressed doubts whether this Theodosia was indeed the saint and martyr they claimed her to be, and others may have questioned the expediency of reviving at this late day, the superstitious regard for relics. To such the indignant Salinis replied:—

"Pious Christians need not examine after the church has decided. True science abstains from judging after the holy see, because it knows with what wisdom, with what maturity, the holy see proceeds in its judgments. Rome is *aided by God* in regulating the catholic world!

"Are you Christians or are you not? If you are not Christians, I pity you: the most wonderful pages found in the history of mankind are hidden from you. If you are Christians, honour St. Theodosia, for she suffered martyrdom, and the martyrs continue the work of the Saviour; they discharge man's part in the work of redemption. They are, after Jesus Christ, *Christs* who open successively by the cross, heaven to all branches of the human family!"

A martyr thus completes for us the work of redemption which Christ begun!

And when the church of Rome tells us that any bone picked up in her quarries, is the bone of a saint and martyr, and should be enshrined in holy altars for reverence, her assertion is proof sufficient; she judges with the wisdom of God, and we ought to submit!

On the 12th of October last, occurred the great religious, military, and civic festival in honour of St. Theodosia. Three cardinals and twenty-seven archbishops and bishops were present. Cardinal Wiseman was there, as the representative and head of the Roman Catholics of England, with two Romish arch-

bishops from Ireland. There was also an archbishop from South America; others from Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland. About fifteen hundred vicars and curates accompanied the prelates. The weather was very unfavourable at first, but the zealous admirers of the new saint were sure she would work a miracle, rather than have her festival marred by the rain, and so they say, that at the precise moment when the carriage which bore the sacred relics began to move, the clouds broke away and a delightful day succeeded!

"A vast crowd encumbered the city. The railroad trains brought in travellers innumerable. All the streets were adorned with green garlands, flowers, and rich carpets. Girls clothed in white robes represented angels, and threw bouquets in the path as the procession advanced. There were triumphal arches, masts crowned with blue, red, and white flags. The vaults of these arches were covered with gold and silver stars. Statues, pictures, banners, and boxes of relics were borne in the procession. A squadron of cavalry and companies of infantry opened the march, for no popish festi-

val is without soldiers. Then came the musicians, monks and nuns, canons and vicars-general, while bishops and cardinals followed, displaying their respective badges. At last appeared the wonderful gilt coach carrying the relics of St. Theodosia! This coach was covered with inscriptions, and bore a colossal statue of the Virgin Mary. The prefect of the department, and many officers and magistrates figured in the procession, probably by order of the government. In the evening the city was splendidly illuminated.

"When the relics of St. Theodosia entered the Cathedral, Cardinal Wiseman ascended the pulpit and pronounced a discourse, in which he compared the removal of Theodosia's remains to Amiens, to that of the patriarch Joseph's bones from Egypt to the land of Canaan, (Joshua xxiv. 32.) He supposes that Theodosia had asked of God when she was dying, that her bones might be brought to her native city, and that God had heard her prayer! He further announced that the new saint would certainly work miracles, to reward the devotion of the citizens of Amiens. The discourse of Cardinal Wiseman was altogether in keeping

with the spirit and sentiments of the attendants of this senseless mummery."

But we forbear. For a proper closing paragraph of this chapter, we return to the vicinity of the catacombs. We will linger for a moment in the church of St. Sebastian, built over their principal entrance. On its inner wall stands conspicuously an inscription, declaring that "whoever shall have entered the catacombs" (that is, through that church, and with the rites, penances, and payments, there required by the priests,) "shall obtain plenary remission of all his sins, through the merits of 174,000 holy martyrs, and of forty-six high pontiffs, likewise martyrs," who are there interred! No better illustration can be given than this of the fearful contrast between the early church founded by "strangers of Rome," in the faith and spirit of the day of Pentecost, and instructed for every good word and work by the great apostle of the Gentiles,—and the corrupt church now seated upon the same seven hills, "arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones, and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations."

CHAPTER XIII.

PRESENT CONDITION OF THE CATACOMBS.

The Campagna is a name given to the extensive plains varied with many slight elevations, in the vicinity of the city of Rome. In ancient times this broad region was fertile, and as highly cultivated as a garden. Heavy crops of grain or grass waved in summer upon every part of it, furnishing to the immense population of the city, no inconsiderable portion of their sustenance. At the same time, the industrious miners were pushing their excavations beneath in every direction, in search of materials for building; so that there was almost as much activity beneath the soil, as among the husbandmen upon the surface. But now the Campagna is as uncultivated and lonely as a desert. It bears the marks of the curse, as plainly as Edom or Babylon. During the proper seed time of the year, it exhales from its soil a malaria

which is destructive to the health of all who breathe it for even a few days.

A poor industrious peasant may plough and sow there, but another will probably reap the harvest—his own reward being only a fatal fever. Almost the only use now made of this large tract is for the pasturage of a few animals, which, from their unrestrained range, are as wild as those untamed in their native wilderness, and dangerous to the unarmed traveller. The surface has become, in some places, marshy, and in others grown over with weeds and bushes. The stranger, walking over it now, can hardly believe that it was ever the scene of so much industry and life as it was when Roman husbandry cultivated every rood of it, except the spaces reserved for the musterings or the encampments of the Roman armies.

As he passes over it, he will observe here and there sunken places or hollows where the roofing of the catacombs beneath has given way; and occasionally if he looks carefully among the thick bushes or under the rank coarse weeds, he will discover a dark hole, through which, if he has sufficient courage, he may descend into some of these

subterranean vaults. These sunken places and hidden pits render it dangerous to walk or ride, without great care, in any part of the Campagna, except on the travelled highways. And even when thus careful, the wanderer can never feel quite secure, when he considers that the thin rock beneath him may become too weak for supporting itself, and may sink at the moment when he is passing.

One who is familiar with that whole region, thus writes concerning it.

"Many a time the wanderer of the Campagna, the desolate Campagna—comes suddenly upon some deep hole—some dark hollow, which if explored, will be found to be one of the innumerable entrances to these quarries, or at least, one of the spots where the superincumbent soil has sunk in, and perhaps closed some branch of the catacombs forever. Indeed, this sudden falling in of the earth after heavy rains, severe frosts, and occasional tremblings of an earthquake, has been a source of much danger. Tales are carefully narrated of scenes too horrible to describe here, of those who heedlessly and without competent guides have entered these

subterranean regions. The earth falling in has crushed or smothered some, while it has debarred forever all exit for others, who have been left there to perish miserably. They who thus sought the catacombs as the grave-place of others, found them only a grave for themselves."

Thus much for their present appearance upon the surface. Let us now, in imagination, follow the visitor as he descends beneath it. We will delay, however, a little at the entrance of the catacombs, while we make a few explanations.

The most convenient entrance at present is from the church of the Convent of St. Sebastian, which stands upon the famous Appian Way, about two miles southeast from the gate of the city. This highway received its name from the Censor, Appius Cæcus, who began it about three hundred years before Christ. It was as nearly straight and level as possible, wide enough for two chariots to go abreast, paved with square blocks of hard stone brought from a great distance, and these blocks were so nicely fitted together as to seem to be one broad smooth rock. This noble work was so thoroughly done

that, after two thousand years, use, it stands, in some places, perfect as ever.

On this ancient and famous road stands the church of St. Sebastian, placed it is said directly above that part of the catacombs in which St. Sebastian was buried. He is supposed to have lived in the third century and to have suffered martyrdom under Diocletian. The tradition is, that he was bound naked to a tree, and then that archers pierced his body until it bristled with arrows, but that he was preserved from death or recovered from it by miracle; that he then voluntarily appeared again before the pagan tribunal confessing his faith and was beheaded for it. These useless miracles are very numerous in the Roman martyrology; sometimes the executioner is represented as exhausting almost all the various modes of capital punishment before his victim condescends to die. St. Sebastian is one of the most popular of the saints at Rome: not so much from any thing extraordinary in the saint himself, as from his being so useful and fine a subject for the pencils of the artists. Paintings of his martyrdom, or rather of the first scene of it, are very common.

We can best convey to the reader a vivid idea of the present aspect of the catacombs, as well as of the common method of visiting them, by quoting at some length from one who made the descent in person. The quotation will also throw light upon the ignorance and extreme credulity of a portion of the Papal church amid all the light of the nineteenth century.

"The monk who acted as guide or ciceroni on our visit to these interesting scenes was selected for his office with admirable judgment and as admirable taste. * * * There he was, an attenuated thing, a living skeleton, with his brown cloak around him to conceal the bones from view; you might fancy you could almost see the light of the candles shining through his ribs; and withal, he looked a meek and subdued man, one who spoke with vivacity—indeed with enthusiasm though his voice was toned with a sad and melancholy cadence. He was very calm, thoughtful and silent if left to himself, but exceedingly animated and communicative when questioned. He spoke in raptures of the subterranean chapel, and gave all real and needful information, as well as a good

deal that was unreal, respecting the catacombs, that the general visitor could require. He supplied each of our party with a lighted candle. He led the way himself with steps slow and solemn, and as stealthy as if he feared to disturb the slumbers of the dead. On he moved, or rather glided, through those dark passages and damp galleries, looking for all the world like a ghost; and, but for the color of his brown monkish dress, with his thin, haggard, attenuated look, and at the same time his earnest, impressive manner, he might well have passed for one of the ancient inhabitants of the catacombs called again to life. He would stop at times and carefully explain all the details of some grave more remarkable than the rest, and at other times he would pause, hold his candle in one hand, and mysteriously point with his other bony hand to some spot or object—look unutterably mysterious, and then drop his eyes to the ground, and pass on without another word. And then, when all was over, he looked so poor and sad—so miserable and meek, and stood so modestly looking for the gratuity usually given on these occasions, with an expression that seemed

designed to move the visitor to more than ordinary liberality, that there really was no resisting the incomparable acting of his silent begging. Poor man! he earns hardly the money he receives." * * * On asking our emaciated and ghostly guide for the signs by which he could ascertain the grave of a Christian from that of a heathen, he replied by pointing to little crosses scratched on the wall beside or above the graves. He pronounced these to be the signs of the Christian faith of the departed dead. This seemed reasonable; but it occurred at the moment that, as these catacombs were in the possession of these monks for some centuries, so they could scratch these crosses over any number of graves that might seem desirable. It was clear they could never be detected, and the character of monks has never been such as to secure them from all suspicion of 'pious frauds.'

"This appeared still more probable when, having lingered a little behind our party in order to examine some grave more accurately, I observed a gentleman occupying himself the mean time in making these crosses with the iron end of his walking-stick! We

agreed that there was no appearance of difference between these and the other crosses, and so our young friend amused himself with making a few more; and when we left the catacombs, he congratulated himself on having made half a dozen saints or Christians at least during his visit!

"I was particularly anxious to learn the means by which the monks were able to ascertain the bones of a saint—the bones of a martyr—from the bones of an ordinary Christian. As the catacombs were the great treasure-house of relics, I wished to learn the tests or signs by which those bones which were to be venerated as relics of saints were to be discerned from the bones of others. * * * * I resolved therefore to ask the question amid the dark vaults and dreary graves of the catacombs, and to obtain my answer amid the fleshless skeletons and long-silent bones of the primitive Christians.

"The poor attenuated skeleton of a monk who seemed to me as pious as he was poor, and as sincere as he was attenuated, stated that one sign was a red mark which was sometimes observed beside a grave. This he said was the blood of the martyr which was

thus sprinkled on this spot in order to remain as a sign of martyrdom. Another sign was a small bottle which was found at many graves but not at all. This bottle was found to contain some deposit of a reddish hue, which it has been inferred was blood—the blood of the person there buried, and who therefore must have died the death of a martyr.

"It at once suggested itself that it was an easy matter for the monks to multiply the number of their images whenever they were in need of a new supply of relics for the market, as they had only to place a red mark upon any grave, or deposit one of these little terra cotta bottles beside it. I felt that at least I could have no great dependence on them, even supposing the signs were real and not fictitious; for there is no authority no ground whatever—not the shadow of authority or ground for supposing that either the red spot or the bottle are signs of martyrdom or saintship any more than of that Christianity which holds salvation by the blood of the cross. If they are signs of any thing particular, they seem rather the the sign of men who died depending on the

blood of Christ, and whose surviving friends gave to their graves that sign of their faith. The truth is, no dependence whatever can be placed on these signs; and I afterward found they were laughed at by the more learned clergy of Rome.

"Our interesting but credulous guide seemed fully to believe what he was stating; and when I inquired as to the tests or signs of a saint,—the means by which the bones of a saint—not a martyr but a saint—might be discerned from the bones of an ordinary Christian, he replied with the most perfect simplicity that when they were first discovered, they emitted a pleasant odor—a delicious fragrance, that ravished the senses; and as this certainly was not the ordinary property of dead men's bones, it seemed to argue—if true—something most marvellous and saintly. But this was not all. When these bones were brought forth into the upper world, they wrought the most wonderful miracles: the sick were healed, the dead were raised, the heretics were converted at the touch or sight of these bones, thus demonstrated to be the relics of some saint.

"There is one instance on record. It was

the case of a skull—a fleshless, eyeless, tongueless, noseless skull. It was questioned, after certain exorcisms, as to the rightful owner, and it answered its name, its residence, and told the circumstances under which its owner was decapitated, dying a martyr's death! What other persons may think of such marvellous doings—such exquisite perfumes from bones, and such interesting colloquies from skulls, it is not for me to determine. The poor monk who guided us through these dreary catacombs seemed religiously to believe them, and he was not singular in doing so. The enlightened portion of the ecclesiastical body, however, are quite as unbelieving as Protestants on these particulars."

Our extract contains some expressions of levity, perhaps unseasonable; and the reader should not forget to distinguish between the easy work of modern imposture and the inimitable marks of genuiue antiquity on the tablets we have transcribed. But the facts stated in this extract authorize us to infer that the Papal church will not be likely to lack members so long as such extreme ignorance and credulity can be found united;

nor will those members be likely to lack patron saints or relics so long as an unscrupulous priesthood have possession of the catacombs.

Let us, in imagination, continue our wanderings a little farther in these subterranean labyrinths before we return to the sweet light of day. We have been contemplating the impositions which are practised upon the credulous and the ignorant in regard to these catacombs and their contents. We will now refresh our eyes and our hearts by a scene of undoubted antiquity—records of unquestionable veracity, and then take our final leave of the catacombs.

Having passed beyond the bounds of other visitors, both of the superstitious and the curious, we find in an obscure branch of an unfrequented crypt, a tomb which has never been opened. We wipe away the dust and mould which, for fifteen hundred years, have been gathering upon the tablet which closes the tomb, and after considerable study, we succeed in making out this inscription in Latin:—

VALERIA SLEEPS IN PEACE!

The name indicates that the sleeper was a female. We infer she was young from the fact that nothing is said of her family connections. The spirit as well as the words of the inscription prove that she was a Christian. No heathen would ever have said or thought so sweet a thing of death as that it is only a peaceful sleep. And these four words—perhaps no human eye has read them or human heart drunk in their consolation till now, since her weeping relatives paid a last sad adieu to her tomb, and went away comforted by the thought that this sleep would ere long end and she would arise refreshed to be forever with the Lord.

This inscription is written upon the stone slab or tablet which closes the mouth of her grave. Now let us carefully break out the lower portion of this slab, so as to leave the inscription entire, and still give us the opportunity of looking within;—very carefully, as if we almost expected her to revive, at the entrance of the light. And what do we see? No bone, no remains of dress or ornament; nothing startling, nothing interesting apparently, nothing in fact except the dust

which has accumulated upon the bottom of the grave.

But is not that dust arranged rather strangely? Observe it carefully. Does it not bear some resemblance to the shadow which a skeleton would cast upon the floor? Does it not appear as if a skeleton had there dissolved into fine dust which then fell and still remains undisturbed, exactly as it fell? It is indeed so: we can not resist the conclusion—we do not *wish* to resist the conclusion, that there lies the precious dust of one of the early Christians of Rome!

We will not, like the Papists, fancy that a fragrance as of incense arises from this tomb of a saint. But if our senses are not addressed with a pleasant odour, the heart is touched with a most pleasing reflection:

"Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints!"

But who was this Valeria, whose mortal part has here lain in sweet repose for fifteen or seventeen hundred years? No one now knows, but Christ who has her name written in his book of remembrance.

She could not have been one of those who suffered during the first persecution, being burned at night as torches to illumine the gardens of Nero;—for then her ashes would have been washed into the Tiber and thence carried into the sea. She was not given to the lions in the Coliseum during some later persecution, as thousands of her faith, and of her sex were;—for then the dust of her mangled body, or of the fragments of it, would not have formed so perfect an outline. She probably died and was deposited here during a time of peace to the Christian church. She may have been a daughter of some poor Fossor, or of some other of the common people who heard of Christ so gladly. Possibly she may have been of the family of Narcissus or of Aristobulus, to whom the great apostle sent Christian salutations in his epistle to the church of Christ

at Rome; or she may have been one of those in the household of Cæsar, who sent their message of love to Christian friends at Philippi, in Paul's Epistle to them. She may have heard that noble apostle preach Christ and Him crucified, and she may have been one of those who visited Paul "in his own hired house" and kindly ministered to him while he was awaiting his trial,—and may she not have stood by, trembling and in tears when he suffered martyrdom for his Lord's sake? But whatever were her good deeds, or her sufferings, her Saviour has not forgotten them. And although we know nothing else of her history with certainty, one fact and that the grand fact, is plainly recorded:—that she fell asleep in Jesus;—and hence, when He shall come again, her dust will rise, not as it was buried, nor ever again to be buried,—but in beauty, honour and glory, immortal and incorruptible, a fit companion for her ransomed and sanctified spirit, and thus united to be forever with the Lord.

How intense would be the interest with which we should visit the catacombs, if all the sleepers were in their places, each be-

hind or beneath his own name and epitaph, and we could know as we passed along, that all things remained as they were left by the early Christians! What place on earth could equal it in interest, excepting only the land where the blessed Redeemer lived and suffered!

But the principal objects of interest found in the catacombs that have been explored, have been removed to the Vatican and to other museums. Every accessible crypt has been examined, the graves rifled, and the inscribed tablets removed. The catacombs now open, are therefore little more than a forsaken mine, or as an old grave-yard from which the coffins and tombstones have been transferred to a new cemetery.

While writing this chapter, there comes to the author's hand a letter from an American clergyman at Rome, giving a brief sketch of his recent visit to these deserted abodes.

"My friends, who had made themselves familiar with every object of interest, were my guides to all the wonders of both ancient and modern Rome. They led me also beneath the surface of things, and showed me

the tombs of the Scipios, and the catacombs, those mysterious excavations, which have been the cemeteries of the dead and the sanctuaries of the living. An old monk with a dim candle, which made the darkness and his own ugliness the more formidable, conducted us through long passages cut from solid rock, which seemed to be endless passages leading to nothing but empty shelves for coffins, and tabular stones with inscriptions dating back to the Christian era, and at last, he brought us out by another way from the entrance, and we breathed freely again on coming into the upper air."

He adds strong expressions of the gloomy aspect of these subterranean caverns. But, however deserted and gloomy these catacombs may now be, they will never be other than interesting to the thoughtful Christian. It will still be true, that there the primitive Christians laboured, and thither they fled for refuge; that there they worshipped and were buried; and that these now naked walls were once adorned with the sweetest memorials of Christian faith and hope which the world has ever seen. These were probably the earliest sculptured records of that

peculiar peace which the religion of Jesus Christ sheds abroad in the believer's heart, as he stands beside the graves of those who died in the Lord: the earliest sculptured records of the power of a Christian faith in giving the believer a victory over death.

Before we return to the upper air, let us take one more walk through these mysterious caverns, giving free rein to reflection as we pass along.

Here, at this opening nearest the city, the ancient Romans began to cut out the tufa or puzzolana for building their houses and temples, bridges and aqueducts, or for the new wall around their young and thriving city. Farther in, are excavations of a later period. Here the poor, industrious Christians wrought with their own hands, the day being turned into night to them. And yet often the night shone as the day; for while at their lonely work, some Christian brother, or perhaps their faithful pastor came down to talk with them of the Saviour's love; bringing tidings, perhaps, of the "acts of the then living apostles," in their great missionary work. By their dim lamps, one of these welcome visitors may have read to

them passages which he had copied from the beloved John's description of heaven, in the last chapters of the Apocalypse,—the first transcript of which had been just received from Patmos or Ephesus. The fact that the Redeemer had sent such comforting messages to his churches, through "the disciple whom He loved," was to them an assurance not only that He loved them still, but that He would save them from the hands of all their enemies. How could they but be comforted in this darkness, and these toils, and sufferings, as they listened to the words uttered by the blessed Redeemer only a few months before, to the prisoner in Patmos:—"There shall be no night *there;* and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever."

And thus they lived and laboured here, in hope of the heavenly rest; and when their toils were over, their bodies were brought down by Christian friends and laid here, in some recess which they had themselves excavated. By their side, at a later period, their children were brought and buried; the parents and the children having,

perhaps, been tortured unto death for the name of the Lord Jesus.

In the small crypt to which we next come, the family of a distinguished Christian lay concealed for several weeks "till the indignation was overpast," their Christian friends coming to them by night with supplies of food. While concealed in this recess, God was their better refuge, their safer hiding-place.

In this wider excavation, the fugitive disciples were wont to assemble for worship on the Sabbath. Some came from their hiding-places in these labyrinths, and others from above ground, the last having entered the catacombs singly, at different places, taking care that they are not followed or seen by their watchful enemies. Thus, in this subterranean chapel where we now stand, did a few of the faithful often assemble, and though their prayers and praises were spoken so low, as not to be heard by the pagans who were passing over their heads, they were all heard and accepted on high. The temple which Solomon built, or that which Titus destroyed, were not more honoured places than this!

Passing along, we come to a more highly vaulted passage, where the recesses upon the sides are more carefully finished. Here were deposited the remains of bishops during the reign of Constantine, and for a century or more afterward. The storm of persecution having now subsided, the Christians prepared these tombs in the manner they considered most honourable to the dead. Here also, and during this same period, devout Christians were wont to come for meditation and prayer, and for the quickening of their piety, by standing near the ashes of distinguished saints and martyrs.

Occasionally, they assembled here upon the Sabbath morning to celebrate their love-feasts, and perhaps the eucharist, and on the anniversary of the death of some eminent saint or martyr, multitudes came to his grave to honour his memory. There were rapidly increasing the rites of a weak superstition; but the heart was still warm with the love of Christ, and acknowledged no other Saviour.

A sudden change came: the rude Goth and his barbarous brethren stalk along these aisles in stupid wonder; unable to read any

of these sacred words; having no pleasant associations with the expressive emblems sculptured upon these tombs. Here and there, they break out the tablet which closes a grave, hoping to find some piece of metal, utensil, or implement which they may turn to account in their rude mode of life. And then, perhaps, this long vault was left unvisited for a thousand years, during which weary period, no ray of light shone upon any of these records, no foot trod upon this solid pavement, no voice echoed along these chambers, no noise whatever was heard here, except, perhaps, the faint sound of footsteps over the surface of the ground above, or the deep roar of the earthquake. By this desertion, this portion of the catacombs escaped desecration by the gross and puerile superstitions of the Middle Ages.

At last, and about three hundred years ago, this sleep of a thousand years was broken. At the call of God, these vaults yielded up the secrets of their dead. This long silence uttered a voice, and that voice bore witness to the truth. It spake to the world many things concerning times, and persons, and experiences, and events of

which we must have been comparatively ignorant but for this testimony. Henceforth, therefore, the catacombs of Rome, although rifled and deserted, will yet always be regarded with interest, as the faithful depositories, for more than a thousand perilous years, of the most unquestionable as well as beautiful evidences of the piety and purity, the sufferings and the triumphs of the early Christian church.

Galba, seventh Emperor of Rome, A. D. 68.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN ROME.

1. *They were generally from the humbler walks of life.*—Tombs usually indicate the rank of the persons within them. The surviving families of the poor cannot adorn theirs; but the rich delight to garnish the sepulchres of their ancestors. Epitaphs usually say all that can be said of the honours of the dead, and crowd the narrow space upon the tomb-stone with the titles of the departed; while upon the other class of these tablets, and that the most numerous, there are registered only

"The short and simple annals of the poor."

Almost all the memorials of the dead found in the catacombs, indicate that they were from the humbler, if not the humblest classes of the Roman population. The tombs indicate no worldly rank, the epitaphs display no worldly titles. The name, the age, and

especially the *Christian faith* of the sleeper, —these are the principal facts recorded, and these are recorded with a brevity and simplicity, like that of the Gospel narratives. There are no indications in the catacombs of wealth, or superior art, until the time of Constantine and afterward; and unhappily, there are evidences there as well as elsewhere, that as soon as these were found in the visible church, luxury and pride also showed themselves, and the primitive simplicity of faith and worship gradually declined. Conformity to the world in outward things not only indicated, but encouraged inward conformity to the worldly spirit. As time advanced, the members of the church were richer men than their predecessors, but were much poorer Christians.

In these records of the earlier Christians, there is none of the inflated style of modern eulogies, in their reference to the position or the characters of the deceased. If the inscriptions could testify of them, that they were the true friends of Christ, they cared little for any other title of honour, or ground of praise. Their only rank was as members of the church of Christ. They were willing

to be accounted servants, and even the servants of servants among men, so long as they were kings and priests unto God. What cared they that the haughty patrician looked down upon them with disdain, since they were acknowledged by Peter, and John, and Paul as brethren, and even called by Christ his "friends," his own "peculiar people." Willing were they to be recorded as only poor Fossors, provided they could have the name of Christ inscribed upon their tombs; and willing they were to lose their lives for the testimony of Jesus, to be buried by night, in the obscurest crypt of those subterranean labyrinths, that they might have part in the first resurrection.

As in the life-time of Paul and of James, so for several centuries afterward, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called," but "God chose the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him."

2. *They were often oppressed and persecuted.* —The catacombs furnish unquestionable records of cases of persecution and martyrdom, and probable indications of many others.

It is no new thing to read in the history of the martyrs, of what they suffered for Christ and how they suffered, and how many thus suffered. We know also who their principal persecutors were, and why they persecuted. These are no new things to us as told in history. But it is quite another thing to read that fearfully precious word *martyr*, upon the tomb-stone of a martyr, just as it was engraved there by his weeping, trembling relatives sixteen hundred years ago!

We have read also of the steadfastness of the martyrs under torture, of the calmness with which they met death in its most fearful forms, and how they rejoiced in it for Christ's sake and triumphed over it. In the Revelation of St. John, we have often read of those who came out of great tribulation, now standing before the throne clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands, the emblems of their triumph; and now, upon some of these tablets we see the palm-branch, just as it was sculptured only a few days or weeks after the body of the faithful one was brought there, and buried by those who had seen him die, and knew that he overcame

death by the blood of the Lamb. It may have been very soon after John wrote that sublime description in Patmos, that the stone-cutter in Rome chiselled this very symbol, in illustration of that passage.

So, too, we knew; for history had often told us that certain Roman emperors persecuted the Christians, and we have felt stirred within at reading the account of their wickedness; but our heart did not then so burn, or our emotions rise so high, as when we read upon these rock-books the names of Adrian and Antonine, and Decius and Diocletian as persecutors, and we know that these very letters were made by persons who had seen these emperors face to face, and, perhaps, had seen them standing by and assenting unto the death of these very martyrs.

Such records as these are not only decisive, but very affecting evidences of the reality of persecution. They not only convince the understanding, but they touch the heart. They are so fresh and direct from the scene of blood, so redolent of trial, so full of the spirit of the times where they were made, that the soul is greatly to be

pitied, that can study them without deep and warm emotions. With such testimonials fresh before us, we cannot consider it a small occasion for gratitude, that we live in an age and country where we have "freedom to worship God."

3. *In all this they maintained a sweet and Christian spirit.*—Among all the records of the catacombs, there is no indication of an angry or complaining spirit, no murmuring at their lowly lot, no envying the condition of their oppressors, nothing like a spirit of revenge or of ill-will toward them; nor is there to be found any thing like a secret feeling that their Lord was unjust or unkind in leaving them to be thus oppressed and persecuted. No; if they had been themselves kings and princes, enjoying every thing that a bountiful Providence ever gave to mortals, their trust in the goodness of God and in the love of their Saviour, could not have been more perfect; nor would they have said less against their enemies and persecutors, if they had received from them only the most equitable or the most merciful treatment. In this matter, they followed in the footsteps of Him, "who, when He was

reviled, reviled not again; and when He suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

According to the Divine precept, they rendered blessing for railing, they overcame evil with good, and showed to their wicked and cruel persecutors a more excellent way. They seem to have experienced the fulfilment of what the Saviour had promised to his first disciples upon the mount:—"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven." If their epitaphs may be taken as an indication of their character and spirit, then surely may we say that among all the followers of the Lamb, who in different ages and in different circumstances have departed this life, none ever fell into a sweeter or more peaceful sleep upon the Saviour's bosom, than these suffering but faithful ones.

4. *The catacombs bear testimony to the simplicity, in their religious character, of the primitive Christians in Rome.*—In worship, they had few forms, and these were the simplest

possible. There was nothing like formality in it. They had little opportunity or ability for such matters, even if they had had the disposition. Their minds were upon the grand truths of Christianity and not upon unessential circumstances. Hence, they laid out their dead in the plainest manner, in any convenient or appropriate place in the catacombs; they took no pains to adorn their sleeping-place, but were content with the simplest tablet that could preserve the name of the departed, and though very careful to perpetuate the fact that the sleeper was a Christian, they were perfectly content to have this fact expressed in the briefest and simplest language possible.

Sometimes, indeed, all words were omitted, and the tablet bore only some significant emblems of his faith. They seemed to desire nothing more than to know and to have it known that the departed one was faithful to his Master even unto death, and then fell into the sweet sleep of the Christian.

Their subterranean chapels were only enlargements of some excavation with the cold rough stone for its floor and ceiling; its darkness but partially dissipated by two or three

rude lamps suspended from the walls, and the only ornaments around were the tombstones of the dead or niches in the walls not yet occupied.

Their worship must have been extremely plain and simple. It would be very interesting to us to know what were the hymns and the tunes they used in praising God and Christ, which the heathen Pliny represents as constituting a most important part of their services—but we have little to aid us in our conjectures as to them. In regard to their prayers, we can infer something of their spirit and their matter from the prayers which recent converts from heathenism offer at this day, especially when they have lost all things but life for Christ, and are in daily expectation of death by violence.

Often, in these subterranean assemblies, they had with them an accredited Christian teacher, who would discourse to them of the whole counsel of God, for their instruction and guidance; but, doubtless, he would under their circumstances particularly address them as to the manner in which they were to act, speak and feel toward the heathen who oppressed them, and would encourage them to

gentleness and patience by the example of their blessed Saviour while on earth; and, doubtless, he often assured them that if they should lose their lives for his name's sake, they would only have a more excellent reward in heaven, and receive it the sooner; and be welcomed by the Saviour, as partakers of his sufferings and of his glory.

If no such teacher were present and no copy or fragment of any of the Gospels or Epistles was in their possession to be read to them, then the intervals between the prayers and hymns may have been occupied with rehearsing the truths which they had heard on some former occasion; or with recounting the sufferings and death, the peace and triumph, of their brethren who had suffered in the amphitheatre since their last meeting

Perhaps some Christian stranger from Asia Minor had found his way to this "secret place of the Most High" and brought to his Roman fellow Christians their latest intelligence from the seven Churches of Asia, and perhaps told them something of what he himself or his father had heard at Ephesus, from the lips of "that disciple whom Jesus loved."

While we are thus meditating among these

tombs, we cannot forbear contrasting the primitive Christianity of Rome with that which is found there at the present time. The church in these latter days has gloried in the possession and the exercise of worldly power. It has untold wealth at its command; it worships in the most gorgeous and costly cathedrals. These paragons of architecture are adorned with the choicest works of ancient and modern art, its formal rites are very numerous and imposing, and many of them utterly inconsistent with the intent of true worship; charming music lends its attractions to the service; spurious relics of saints and martyrs appeal to the superstition of the worshipper; and, if all these things fail to attract, a priesthood thoroughly furnished for the work and separated by vows from every common human interest, stands ready to employ any means for accomplishing their main design of sustaining their power over the minds of men.

These are harsh words, but no others can express the sad reality. And all this is within sight of the catacombs, and by the side of the Lapidarian gallery wherein are so many evidences of the simplicity of the early Chris-

tians; all this is over the very spot where they claim that the ashes of the noble Peter himself repose. Could that faithful apostle awake again to life, he would inquire with wonder where he was. He would ask in astonishment why that architectural wonder of the world should be named after himself. As he looked around upon the splendid adornings of the place, and among them recognised images placed for adoration which he had seen eighteen huudred years before worshipped in the heathen temples; as he gazed in wonder upon the pompous pageantry that attends some of their religious festivals, and saw how all the honors of the occasion seemed to be given to the pope, and how much more was said and thought of St. Peter than of St. Peter's Saviour, methinks he would exclaim in agony of soul: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him!"

There is hardly one point of resemblance between the primitive and the modern church of Rome. Among all the genuine relics of the primitive church taken from the catacombs which they preserve with jealous care and with a regard bordering upon religious

veneration, there is hardly one which does not prove that the modern church has not only degenerated from the simplicity and piety of the primitive church, but has so far departed from that standard as to hold but a doubtful claim to the rights of a church of Christ. If it is Christian, it is but little better than apostate Christianity. It has lost not only the spirit and the power, but even the form of the original.

May the Great Head of the church ere long recover it to its primitive purity, simplicity and spirituality, that it may be worthy of the Apostle whom it claims as its founder, and worthy of the other Apostle who had much more agency and influence than Peter in its early history; and most of all, that it may be confirmed to the will of the Great Head of the Christian church: "who loved it, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word;—that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

From all the foregoing, we may infer that goodness is the only true greatness, and

piety the only permanent honour. In other words, that which God approves, and only that, is truly good and great and honourable. That alone will enjoy a *permanent* prosperity.

What changes Divine providence has wrought! "He setteth up one and casteth down another." At his word the mountain cometh to nought, and the small stone becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. The old paganism of Rome, enthroned in power and pride, apparently secure of an eternal dominion, has long been cast down to the ground, while Christianity, which was then only as a weak infant, now rules among the rulers of the world. The vestiges that now remain of the grandeur of that stupendous pagan power, only serve to illustrate the history of things that have passed away; while Christianity, which received hardly any thing more than a passing sneer from the Roman pagan historians, has now spread its name and influence through lands of which the old Roman never dreamed. At God's bidding, the vitality departed from the spreading tree of the Roman empire, and passed into Christianity, the young plant which grew under its shadow. "God

hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence."

We should then guard against judging too much by present appearances. We should the rather judge righteous judgment,—as God judges. Again we say, that is great which is permanently so, and that is good which God approves; and whatever God approves as great and good, will ultimately prosper, however feeble and unpromising it may at any time seem to man.

If, under the most unfavourable circumstances, the vine which God planted in Rome, survived the wounds of the axe, and the violence of fire, took deep root, and spread so that its glory filled the land, and is filling the whole world, then Christianity will prosper wherever God calls upon his people to plant it. He will nourish it, and therefore it must thrive. If that stupendous

heathen power, with all its vast resources of wealth, and strength, and numbers, and malignity, was unable to crush the life out of Christianity while it was yet in its infancy, then the gates of hell shall never prevail against the church of Christ; no weapon formed against it shall prosper, and all they are evermore safe who abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Moreover, if Christianity made conquest of Rome with so little aid of human learning, and with no aid of worldly power, without the patronage of the world's mighty ones, and independent of the world's policy and cunning, then it may, in all its future operations upon a wicked world, rely for success upon those elements of simplicity, honesty, purity and love which characterized the piety and the labours of the primitive Roman Christians. In other words, to learn the best method of propagating Christianity and of converting the world, we should study the catacombs rather than St. Peter's.

How wonderful and how instructive are the providences of God with the righteous and the wicked! While Christianity was thus entering Rome and the Roman empire,

Pompeii was suddenly buried, and, as it were, hermetically sealed up in lava to be preserved for later times, as a specimen of what that heathenism was, with which Christianity had to struggle. Soon afterward, the Christians of Rome began to be interred in the catacombs as we have already related; and they, too, were ere long shut up as if for preservation, that coming times might see with their own eyes what primitive piety was, and admire the grace of God which could mould such lovely characters out of the corrupt materials of Roman paganism.

Now, with what different emotions are these two classes of ancient Romans exhumed! Every relic from Pompeii which indicates the moral character of its inhabitants at all, excites only loathing or abhorrence. A few only of these relics are quite sufficient to satisfy any one that these ancient pagans may have sat for the awful picture of heathenism which inspiration has drawn, in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans. While on the other hand, not a Christian relic, or symbol, or word has been found in all the catacombs, which does

not indicate the utmost purity of character; not one allusion which a virtuous and Christian mind may not dwell upon with pleasure. No stain is left where any follower of the Lamb perished. Christians died not as the fool dieth.

Standing between Pompeii and the catacombs to-day, it is not difficult to admit that, in the judgment of God, and even in the estimation of all reasoning men, one of those true Christians of the catacombs was of more worth than all the corrupt dwellers in Pompeii; and that the least in the kingdom of heaven to-day is, in truth, greater than all the ancient heathen Romans. Once more, then, do we say that *that only is truly great and good, which is permanently so, and they only are truly blessed whom God approves.*

What a scene of astonishment would the resurrection be to the old inhabitants of this historical neighbourhood, if the trumpet of God should now sound. The pagan Romans would arise to find their glory departed, their proudest works crumbled, the temples and images of their gods demolished, and their names forgotten. They inquire for "the eternal city," as it was, and they

are pointed to a few indistinct mounds of dust and ruined monuments, as all that survives of them. They call upon Jupiter for help, upon Mars also, and Apollo, upon Venus, and Juno, and Minerva, but "there is no voice, nor any that answereth." Then they ask what this new power is, which they see as the life-giving element in all the ruling powers of the earth. The answer of God is: "This is the branch of my planting, the work of my hands that I may be glorified. A little one has become a thousand, and a small one, a strong nation. I the Lord hasten it in his time."

Remembering how they lifted up the sword against the Lord and against his Christ, and against the lives of his saints, they are seized with consternation, and they say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand."

With the followers of the Lamb who come up from their sleep in the catacombs, the surprise is equally great, but attended with very different emotions. They awake

to find their brightest hopes far exceeded by the glorious reality. The time of their deliverance and triumph has come. Their despised Redeemer appears as King of kings and Lord of lords. They lift up their heads and shout, for their redemption draweth nigh. "Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord."

Happier far the poor Christian Fossor than the pagan Cæsar.

The subject of our volume has carried us back in our thoughts to an intimate communion with "the glorious company of the apostles," "the noble army of martyrs," and "the goodly fellowship" of their disciples and brethren, who received the same truth, and died in the like precious faith. Let our thoughts, as we close this volume, go forward to the day when "all that sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. Oh that illustrious day, when I shall join that divine assembly of souls!" So exclaimed the great Roman orator, at the thought of meeting after death, the departed great of his own

country. If the reader's heart has been impressed, as ours, with the purity, gentleness, cheerful patience, and never-failing charity of the early Christians, among whose tombs we have been wandering, he has earnestly wished, that he may be counted worthy to stand with them "at the resurrection of the just." Blessed beyond all earthly bliss, are they who can look forward with a sure hope of this eternal fellowship with all the good. Unto that fellowship, our own kindred and friends who have fallen asleep in Christ, are already gathered. "Oh that illustrious day, when we shall join that divine assembly of souls!"

"If the mere conception of the reunion of good men in a future state, infused a momentary rapture into the mind of Tully; if an airy speculation, (for there is reason to fear it had little hold on his convictions,) could inspire him with such delight, what may we be expected to feel, who are assured of such an event by the true sayings of God! How should we rejoice in the prospect, the certainty, rather, of spending a blissful eternity with those whom we loved on earth; of seeing them emerge from the ruins of the

tomb, and the deeper ruins of the fall, not only uninjured, but refined and perfected, with every tear wiped from their eyes, standing before the throne of God and the Lamb in white robes, and palms in their hands, crying with a loud voice, Salvation to God who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lord forever and ever! What delight will it afford to renew the sweet counsel we have taken together, to recount the toils of combat, and the labour of the way, and to approach not the house but the throne of God, in company, in order to join in the symphonies of heavenly voices, and lose ourselves among the splendours and fruitions of the beatific vision!

"To that state all the pious on earth are tending; and if there is a law from whose operation none are exempt, which irresistibly conveys their bodies to darkness and to dust, there is another, not less certain or less powerful, which conducts their spirits to the abodes of bliss, to the bosom of their Father and their God. The wheels of Nature are not made to roll backward; every thing presses on toward eternity; from the birth of time an impetuous current has set in,

which bears all the sons of men toward that interminable ocean. Meanwhile, heaven is attracting to itself whatever is congenial to its nature, is enriching itself by the spoils of earth, and collecting within its capacious bosom whatever is pure, permanent, and divine; leaving nothing for the last fire to consume but the objects of the slaves of concupiscence; while every thing which grace has prepared and beautified, shall be gathered and selected from the ruins of the world, to adorn that eternal city, "which hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God doth enlighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Titus, eleventh Emperor of Rome.

APPENDIX.

As an appropriate appendix to this volume, we add a few paragraphs from *"A Visit to Europe,"* just published, by our distinguished countryman, Professor Silliman, of Yale College. Our extracts are from the first volume, (pp. 321 and 329.)

In connection with his visit to Rome, Professor Silliman says:—.

THE GALLERY OF ANCIENT SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS is extremely interesting. It is a long avenue within the walls of the Vatican, and is filled entirely with the records of the dead—the dead of centuries long past. From the tombs on the Appian Way, and from the sepulchres of the early Christians, a vast collection has been formed of ancient monumental inscriptions and devices, sculptured chiefly in marble, and often very rudely. On the left side of the gallery, in the direction in which you are conducted through it, are seen the inscriptions for the early Christians; on the right, those of the Pa-

gans. There are more than 3000 of these monumental stones. They are merely marble tablets, frequently of irregular form, and attached to the walls; occasionally, they are in the form of distinct busts, and more rarely of sarcophagi. The inscriptions on the Pagan monuments are not wanting in tenderness, but they are without that hope which cheers the Christian—a frequent termination on the monuments of the latter is "in pace." The Pagan inscriptions are classified according to their profession, origin and rank—from slaves and servants to deified heroes, emperors and empresses. All the numerous servants and officers of Cæsar's household form one division, magistrates another, citizens another, and so on. When we are among them, we feel that we are conversing with the ancient dead, and the effect on the mind is that of pensive and profitable contemplation.

Church of St. Sebastian, and the Catacombs.—This church is without the walls, and it is named from the martyr, St. Sebastian, whose lacerated statue reposes before us pierced with arrows, thus illustrating the manner in which he was murdered.

This is a small church, but it is rendered painfully interesting by the catacombs, the opening into which is beneath the building. They are called the Catacombs of St. Calisto, or Calixtus. It is believed that these catacombs were originally excavated by the Romans, to obtain puzzolana. They are winding, intricate passages, real labyrinths, formed not only in branches, but in stories, of which there are three. They are continued underground, as is said, twenty miles to Ostia, the port of Rome at the mouth of the Tiber in one direction, and to Albano, twelve miles in another. In some places the excavations are in large chambers, which the traveller views with intense interest, as it is an undoubted fact that these gloomy recesses afforded an asylum to the ancient Christians for their derided and forbidden worship. Here they sympathized, and here they praised God, and prayed to him for protection against their cruel persecutors; resorting, as is said, in disguise, to the city in the day, and assembling here at night, for safety and worship. Some of these subterranean cavities seem to have been fitted up to a certain degree as chapels, and portions of stucco are found adhering to the walls. The oldest portrait of our Saviour was found in one

of these subterranean chambers, as is supposed, and dates back to the third century.

Here also the early Christians found a refuge for their dead, and thousands were interred here in holy secrecy. As we wandered in these ancient solitudes, it was impossible to suppress strong emotions (and who would wish to do it?) when we saw the empty graves dug into the sides of the caverns and galleries. It was easy to tell which way the body lay, as there was a place hollowed out for the head, for they appeared to have been buried generally without coffins, the indurated puzzolana forming a sufficient sarcophagus, and it was rare that any other was provided. The tomb was often closed by a marble slab with an inscription.

There were niches in the walls, which appear to have been intended for lamps.

Many of the marbles with inscriptions, which we saw in the Vatican, were taken from these graves, and along with them many of those interesting personal relics that have been already mentioned. Some of the graves have never been opened—the marble door is closed even with the side wall, and appears undisturbed.

We had a monk for our guide;—he bore a light,

while each of us was furnished with a candle, and thus we followed him in his devious wanderings. We, however, became willing to return before we had strayed too far; for so numerous were the ramifications of these wonderful labyrinths that it seemed very possible to lose our way, although under the guidance of one who was familiar with the intricate windings of this mysterious cemetery. This feeling was not diminished when a door was pointed out to us—a door now closed and sealed—through which, no longer ago than 1837, a schoolmaster entered with ten or twelve of his scholars, and all were lost; neither he nor his confiding pupils were ever heard of again; they perished by a most miserable death, entombed alive, and their bodies were added to those which these catacombs still contain.

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